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THE FAR CALL

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By

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THE FAR CALL

CHAPTER I

NORTH of Fifty-Three, north of the Aleutian Islands that string off between Alaska and Siberia, there are four little dots of land lost in an immense gray sea. They lie almost exactly on the 170th meridian, the line which slices down through Bering Strait and parts the gray hair of the Pacific exactly in the middle—really the dead-line between the East and the West. These four land-dots comprise the Pribilofs—the Treasure Islands of modern times.

True, they are bleak enough in winter, and lonely as death. But when the sun rises high and the days grow long, when the sleet changes to gentle rains and the ice-pack crumbles and breaks, they become like the palace of Midas. Gold out of the sea! Living treasure, swarming the fog-blown beaches! Roaring, milling, lustrous in the sea mist, shimmering in the scant sunlight, moving, melting, rippling in incarnate beauty, the great fur-seal herd return again to its island breeding ground.

They come to no other shore. With a whole world

to choose from, they touch land only at St. Paul and St. George, the two main islands of the Pribilofs. Out of the deep they come, to breed and bear young, to roar and fight and revel during the summer days, and unto the deep they go again. And what far seas they visit man can only guess, and why they should always return to these same little, lost, and storm-cursed islands, no man can dream.

But why have they not been killed off long ago? How does the herd survive, when seal fur is so high? Certainly it is not because of the mercy of the nations. Foreign powers have always wrangled over the precious pelts; and since women love fine raiment, hundreds of hunters pursued the seals. Rather the answer lies in the strong hand of the Yankee government. Under the wise and careful jurisdiction of United States' own Bureau of Fisheries the herd has recovered from its former frightful losses and has actually increased. And when, in 1911, the Yankee cutters began to police the seas, and the sea-hunters were driven away, the survival of the mighty band seemed assured. Surely, in these tame latter days, no other organized foe would rise to menace it.

The sealing schooners sailed away or were confiscated, and indeed all shipping ceased in the waters about St. Paul. Weeks would pass without the glimpse of a sail, and the hollowness was split no more by the wail of a siren. Sometimes a cutter slipped from one fog-bank into another, and sometimes the Eider, the

Bureau of Fisheries launch, chugged stanchly up from Dutch Harbor, but strange keels there were none, and the wind rarely flaunted a foreign flag. So it was no wonder that an old bull seal rose on his flippers and stared when a ship's boat came drifting in in the dusk, onto the beach of St. Paul.

This was a summer night in June. The roaring rookery life was at its height. The fog had drifted afar, and the moon was out, so that the boat lay like a black shadow on the steely waters. In the boat were seven men, a motley crew whose unshaven faces and disheveled appearance indicated that they had been adrift for several days. And one of the men—Pal Loring, who sat in the bow—was a type to puzzle the old government sealers dwelling on the island.

Somehow, he hardly looked like a sailor. His hands were too thin and long; his gait, as he landed and strode up the shore, lacked the sway and roll of those who habitually walk on heaving decks. In brighter light his eyes were puzzling too: they were not dim and wistful like the eyes of those who ever stare into vague and watery horizons. Instead they were intensely bright. When fellow adventurers forgot all else of Pal Loring, always they remembered his eyes, gleaming with a quenchless gaiety out of their deep hollows. Now they were glowing with some deep, jubilant emotion.

He was young—barely thirty—homely save for his vivid eyes, and his tall, thin frame was roughly clothed;

so it was strange that he seemed so apart from the men of his crew. In distant cities passers-by had glanced at him carelessly, then with surprised intensity. Perhaps he carried a manner of genuine and deep-taught sophistication—something far beyond a mere pose of cynicism, and which is seen in strong men used to power. Obviously he was the leader of the little crew. The oarsmen waited while he climbed a near-by rise in search of the island village.

He moved with stealing, awed steps. Presently he came out on a rich meadow covered with wet, rank grass, in which huge stones lay hidden.

It was not a place to expect human beings. Wild and alone, it seemed solely a playground of the winds. The village was more than a half-mile distant; the only light was the fine-spun filaments of day and the silver distillation of the moon. Yet Loring had no more than surmounted the rise when he came face to face with a child.

Surely it *was* a child. The girl with the white light on her face was certainly not more than fifteen years of age. She was only shoulder-high, and slim as a boy, and she wore her hair in two braids, one over each shoulder. Even the moon showed up gold in these braids. If this silver gleam could do so much, what would the sunlight do? The gold must be real and fine or it would be turned to lead by the inverted alchemy of moon-magic.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

She seemed about to turn and run. Loring had seen deer, in far-off leafy jungles, give this same little start, and hover, feet barely touching the ground, before they darted away. And no wonder she was afraid—to meet a stranger in the dead of night, in the land to which strangers do not come.

"Don't be alarmed," he said quickly. "I came in a life-boat, and I'm looking for the village."

"I'm not alarmed now." Her voice, full-toned in the silence, told many things about her that the twilight had concealed. For instance, she was more than fifteen. She might even be nineteen. Still she had a child's way of taking things for granted. "Has there been a wreck somewhere?"

"No. We belong on the whaler Jutland. A man fell overboard, and seven of us put out in a boat to get him. We couldn't find him, and afterwards we couldn't find the ship. The fog came up, and for some reason or other we couldn't hear the whistle. We've been a couple of days in an open boat."

"So that accounts for you, does it?" She nodded and smiled, and her voice was more friendly. "Another mystery knocked all to pieces. To be honest, I thought that I had at last seen a real ghost."

"I'm a pretty solid-looking spook, I'm afraid," Loring observed.

"Yes, but you didn't look solid in the moonlight, and anyway I was sort of expecting a ghost. One is supposed to haunt this reef—Captain Webber, the great-

est man this island ever grew, who with his wife died in the surf twenty-five years ago. The natives have always said that he was coming back sometime, in the flesh, and for a minute I thought he really had."

Loring collected his men, and the girl led them to the village. They made an almost silent file. She was likewise silent—her swift flood of speech had abruptly died. She was a guide, nothing more. She did her work with that dignity and calmness which so often characterizes the frontier women, and which seems to be taught by wild earth.

She halted the file at the door of one of the larger administration buildings and went to waken "Little Kris," the director of the islands. The latter emerged presently, a slim man of medium height who listened attentively to the story of Loring's mishap.

"We'll have to hang out here for a few days, until our ship can come and take us off," Loring said. "I don't suppose there'd be any way of getting transportation to Nome and boarding her there."

"Not a chance on earth, unless you want to go a long way around and take a long time about it," the administrator answered. He seemed entirely friendly, and his voice carried that welcome to strangers which is the tradition of the Lonesome Lands. "No commercial vessels come in here, you know. Our only means of transportation to the outside is our own launch, the Eider, and it hasn't any regular schedule."

"Do you think we could get off on one of the cutters—the U. S. coast-guard vessels?" Loring's tones were steady and full. "There'll surely be one of 'em in port before long, won't there?"

"There may not be one all summer, unless we ask for it especially by radio," Kris explained. "They do sea patrol, you know, and haven't much time to visit around, and their base is Unalaska, not here. Besides, I doubt if they'd be allowed to carry passengers."

"Then we'll have to get in touch with our own ship. I want to report to them anyway, to tell them we're all right and that the man overboard was drowned. If you don't mind, I'll come into your office and write out a wireless message."

Loring seemed to take a long time to the composition. It was twenty minutes before he emerged from the office with the finished script. It was of night-letter length, and read as follows:

CAPTAIN STORKERSEN,
Auxiliary Schooner Jutland:
Set of currents forced us to strike for Pribilofs. Landed here midnight. No trace of Eskimo Glosamuk to date. Coast-guard vessels not expected soon, and anyway are not allowed to carry passengers, so pick us up here. LORING.

The telegram dispatched, Loring turned with sudden eagerness and stared into the dusk. He had for-

gotten something—something of haunting significance —and remembrance seemed to bring a warm glow to his chilled body. He had not come here alone. There had been a guide swinging along before him in the trail. For a half-hour he had lost her, as he had given himself to the business at hand, but now he must find her again. He wanted to see once more the moonlight in her hair.

She was only a child, not more than nineteen. It was strange, then, that her presence could so fill this darkened road. Yes, she was still waiting. In the wan dusk he saw her nod to him.

As always she was direct. "If you're through talking, I'm going to take you to our house and give you something to eat," she said. "After living on bread and water for two days you ought to be mighty hungry."

Thus she struck at the root of things. Nothing of subtleties or small talk could reach him so straight. "I'd like to come very much, if it won't be too much trouble."

"It won't be any trouble. I like to feed people, when they're really hungry. Besides, it's the Alaskan custom to be hospitable to strangers."

So when the men went to their appointed quarters she took him to her house. It was one of the larger structures on the hill back of the native village, and warm from a glowing coal stove. She paused a moment at the door of her mother's room, explained the

situation in a few words, and then led Loring into the kitchen.

"Since there's nobody to introduce us, I suppose we'll have to introduce ourselves," she told him. "I'm Hilda Larsen, and I live here with my mother. We teach the village school, she taking care of the higher grades while I look after the primary grades. We're among the oldest white settlers on the island."

"My name is Pal Loring," her guest replied. He smiled with frank cheer. "I must say that our names seem sort of switched around. Loring sounds like a school-teacher's name, and Larsen sounds as if it ought to be yelled down the deck of a ship."

"That's so. But I'm entitled to my name—my father was a Norwegian skipper. Most all of the girls who take jobs like mine have some Norse blood in them."

Loring felt oddly gratified by this answer. It pleased him to know that his companion of this hour was of conqueror stock, one of the fair-skinned, blue-eyed, white-armed daughters of the North. "Maybe you're the daughter of 'Wolf' Larsen, Jack London's famous sealer?" he asked lightly.

"No. I wouldn't be so proud of father if he'd been a sealer. You don't know as much as I do about the men who killed seal at sea, or you'd understand."

Straightway she went to her work. She did not even stop to ask him what he wanted, but simply cooked him what she thought he needed. And it was

not any of the delicacies which sweethearts prepare for their swains in gentler lands. It was plain ham and eggs, red and yellow in the pan. And he watched their preparation with frank delight.

He was warm, soothed, and relaxed. He liked to see the firelight flash up the girl's white arms; he followed with half-shut eyes her calm, efficient motions. Nor was he embarrassed when her task was completed. She sat across the table from him, pleased with the vigor of his appetite and his frank enjoyment of the good food.

"I was lucky to meet you," he told her simply. "And if I knew you a little better I'd ask what chance brought you out there on the point at midnight."

"If I knew you a little better I might tell you."

They talked of other things, and so pleasantly did the time pass that Loring might now regret his telegram to the mother ship. He need not have been so hasty in making arrangements to leave the island. Yet he did not seem cast down. A curious bright spark lingered in his eyes. And because Hilda could not follow the telegram through the empty air and see it reveal its hidden message, she could not understand.

Schmidt, wireless operator on the Jutland, picked up the telegram from his key and took it to his captain, a huge Norwegian named Storkersen. Yet it was the name of the drowned man Glosamuk, rather than the message itself, that first seemed to take the captain's eye. He chuckled a little: this was the key

word of the telegram, and a better name could not have been manufactured. Plainly Loring had evolved the message with care. Storkersen took pencil and paper and began to decipher as follows:

G (the first letter of the variable key-word) is the seventh letter of the alphabet.
L is the twelfth letter of the alphabet.
O is the fifteenth letter of the alphabet.
S is the nineteenth letter of the alphabet.
A is the first letter of the alphabet.
M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet.
U is the twenty-first letter of the alphabet.
K is the eleventh letter of the alphabet.

According to Storkersen's prearranged code with Loring, the numerical position in the alphabet of the letters of a variable key-word—manufactured separately for each cryptogram—would determine what words in an innocent-appearing message were to be heeded. The alphabetical positions of the letters of the present key-word, Glosamuk, thus gave the numbers seven, twelve, fifteen, nineteen, one, thirteen, twenty-one, and eleven. And now Storkersen was ready to look at the message as a whole.

Set of currents forced us to strike for Pribilofs. Landed here midnight. No trace of Eskimo Glosamuk to date. Coast-guard vessels not expected soon and anyway are not allowed to carry passengers, so pick us up here.

The seventh word of this message is "strike."
The twelfth word is "midnight."
The fifteenth word is "of."
The nineteenth word is "date."
The first word is "set."
The thirteenth word is "no."
The twenty-first word is "guard."
The eleventh word is "here."

The words put in proper sequence thus gave the message:

Strike midnight of date set. No guard here.

So all was well. Loring's great project progressed. The revenue cutters were far at sea, and a blow that would echo around the world could be struck on the hour ordained.

CHAPTER II

IT IS a far cry from St. Paul Island, in the Pribilof group, to Ling Fu's dive in Shanghai, but there must one go to find the beginnings of Loring's enterprise. The time is early May—about six weeks before his arrival on the seal-thronged beach. The warm waters of the Whangfoo lap at the docks, and the icy depths of Bering Sea are distant as a dream. The teeming earth of Asia is at his feet.

Ling Fu's Pleasure Palace! It is a famous place, and its front-door opens bravely on the Yangste Poo Road. Just where the back-door opens is a mystery known only to Ling Fu and certain of his trusted yellow men, but apparently it is on a road that leads farther than the dock, and farther than any region of which tales are told. When undesirable customers go through that door, they simply do not return again. But it was the front door to which Pal Loring came, this May night. He hoped to transact his business and depart by the same way.

Ling Fu's trade is with sailors mostly, so Pal Loring seemed an intruder. Yet he made himself promptly at home. He swung over to an empty table, sat down, and with boyish enthusiasm began to take stock of his

surroundings. His eyes lighted up like diamonds under the yellow lamps.

His first impression was, strangely enough, of beauty. The effect of light and shadow was as of a Rembrandt canvas. The benches and tables of teak had a dark glow under the yellow lamps, not because of fine workmanship, but because of a polish imparted by years of use—of brushing bodies and restless hands. His gaze glanced lightly over the squalor and sordidness that betrayed the typical Shanghai dive, and sought out several objects of rare charm. One was a great blue Chinese lamp, like a fabulous vase, which was no doubt Ling Fu's pride. Another was a fine ship model in a glass case, and the third was a painting hung over the bar—a remarkable conception of the Flying Dutchman. How such a precious thing ever found its way here, and what devils had plagued the master who painted it, would be a tale beyond any that Loring's vivid life had known.

Meanwhile his other senses were not idle. There is no sense so stimulating to the association areas of the brain as that of smell, and the smells of Ling Fu's Pleasure Palace haunted him like a dream. He recalled other nights in other dives opening on the by-roads of other harbors. There was always this same scent of stale incense hanging like a curtain of mist under the low ceilings. There was the fume of oil lamps and, ebbing and flowing like a tide, a miasma of stagnant water under the floor. Then there were faint

wisps of scent, hard to identify: racial smells—Negro and Chinese and Malay; the acrid residue of devil-chasing firecrackers; the taint of cheap perfumery.

There was almost no loud sound. In spite of its flamboyant name, the tone of the palace was somber and hushed. Loring had been prepared for this fact—he had met it elsewhere in a hundred such dives up and down the coast—yet it always startled him. The subdued talk and the little noises from the tables seemed to enhance by contrast the hush of the room. When a harsh, loud laugh rang out, everyone looked up.

The waiters—quiet-eyed Chinese carrying drinks on little lacquer trays—moved softly and spoke low. A game of fan-tan progressed quietly at a table to one side. Ling Fu, the proprietor, mounting guard beside the bar, was himself silent as an idol.

Still Loring felt no repugnance. The squalor, the vice, the occasional gleam of beauty, the menacing silence and the haunting scents were all in keeping, all in key with life as he knew it, and therefore satisfactory. He had learned to face the world frankly, the good and the bad, the salt and the sweet, and to drain the cup of every hour to its bitter dregs. In the people about the tables he found the same theme carried out. Here was the same checkerboard of light and shadow. Here were earth and sky, the stars of dreams and the hell-gate of despair.

Beauty in this sodden, murmuring crew? His keen eyes saw plenty of it—the beauty of truth, if nothing

else. The polished bronze of a Negro's skin. . . . The white column of a Danish seaman's throat. . . . The lamp-light in the meshes of a moll's hair.

He found that he knew quite a number of Ling Fu's customers. In a group of four, yet somehow apart, sat London Nick, one of the few men on the broad earth whom Loring feared. He smiled a little at Nick's raiment, but his smile was faint and lip-bitten, and half-concealed under his long fingers. He had no desire to come to grips with the viceroy of the Yellow Sea. Men had died—and this was not legend, but cold and brutal fact—for laughing at London Nick. He was not without a sense of humor—indeed, some of his jests made gossip in a hundred dives up and down the China seas—but he did not appreciate mirth at his own expense.

Loring recalled what he had heard of Nick's career. In the first place, the foppish figure was not an Englishman at all, but a Russian. Of humble origin, he had been one of the tigers of the Revolution. It was said that he once stood close to Lenin, held office in the Cheka, and performed such valiant deeds that even in the shambles of the first Red Year he had risen to fame. The exact nature of these deeds no one seemed to know, but they were the stuff of legends.

Loring remembered hearing that Nick had quarreled with Lenin. Lenin had accused the young Tartar of aristocratic tendencies. Before the year was out he had to flee for his life, taking refuge in the cosmo-

politan whirlpool which is Shanghai. In the years since, he had risen to dominance among the gentlemen of the coasts.

He had renounced Russia. In public at least he spoke only English. This fact, and his exaggerated English costume, won him his nickname. Now he sat, a powerful figure, on his bench—debonair, lazy, apparently unaware of the whispered talk that went on about him. He smoked a cigarette in a long ivory holder; he dangled a monocle on a black tape. Three ruffians occupied the table with him, but they did not seem to speak to him, and Loring concluded at last that he was not a member of their party.

Presently Nick looked up. He had suddenly realized that he was no longer the center of interest in the room, a fact that affected him unpleasantly. Like most men of his type, he was colossally vain, and he had no desire to share the limelight with a rival. Indeed, it was not a case of sharing, but of being thrust back into second place. Another figure now dominated the room.

A newcomer was being recognized. One pair of eyes after another looked to the thin, keen-eyed man at the table in the corner. And a whisper moved like a little wind about the room.

"That's Pal Loring," the whisper said.

London Nick's gaze grew cold. Through his English mask, the Tartar showed. And now Loring wished that Cap'n Storkersen would hurry. Storkersen was a Norwegian skipper, and his hands were hard from

handling frozen lines. The presence of one stanch ally in this room of enemies would be a tremendous consolation.

Yet, while Loring was suspicious and uneasy, still he had no inkling of his real position. He did not dream of the red thoughts that crept like little tongues of flame through Nick's mind. He knew that the Russian disliked him, and was jealous of him, but he did not know that this perfumed dandy actually coveted his life. Why? Nick himself did not know.

Of course, jealousy alone in such men as Nick merges easily into hatred. Besides, he and Loring always seemed to block each other's trail. They sprang from different races; they stood for different things. It was a strange fact that Loring's scruples, the very fairness of his weapons, heightened the rancor of his foe.

Yet in the end it was not Nick who precipitated matters, but one of the three ruffians who sat at his side. This man, a surly Scot of huge mold, arose quietly from his bench, pushed it out of the way, and strode straight across the room to Loring's table.

The little hushed sounds of the room suddenly died away. The men about the tables were frozen, like figures in a photograph. One frowzy woman held a glass touching her lips. A huge Negro, humming a little homesick song at a distant table, paused in the middle of a note. Only the fan-tan game progressed

—the counters laid off three by three, three by three, with the fateful precision of a chronometer.

There lay a shadow across the Scot's face. It was not an effect of the lamps, but some darkening from within. Loring saw it, and a wind brushed over his skin, ending in the roots of his hair, and the connecting-rods of his muscles seemed to slip and slide into place. He was not frightened—it would not be for Loring, a help-yourself fighter since he was eighteen, to bow down in fear at the sight of a dark face—but his eyes no longer roved about the room, and he was quickening to that intense excitement, that superb consciousness of being, at once the goal and the reward of all his adventures. And he made no outward motion, unless one counted the kindling of even higher lights under his lids.

He already knew quite a little about his enemy. In the first place, the Scot was a "mad fighter"—that is, he fought for hate. The storm-cloud on his face showed this all too plainly. He would not love—with a fierce Viking love—the men who stood up to him, blessing them for the strong delights afforded. And now, under the lamp, Loring recognized the man. Plainly there was more to the affair than he had guessed at first. This was Red Dunkirk, a fighter of some fame. If the treacherous foe had been scheming to humble Loring, he could scarcely have chosen a better agent. And it was a fact that London Nick looked

extremely pleased with all things. He twirled his monocle, and blew lazy clouds of cigarette smoke into the scented air.

Dunkirk paused at Loring's table. "Back again, I see," he muttered.

Loring looked up, smiled, and slowly got to his feet. He thrust his bench to one side. "Yes, I'm back again."

Throughout the room could be heard the faint whisper of escaping breaths. London Nick screwed his monocle into his eye-socket. In one corner a Swedish-American whaler cursed in his beard. "Dis ain't goin' to be fair," he told his fellow. "Dunkirk outweighs dat skinny faller by t'irty pound."

"Wait and see," the other breathed. "Dat skinny faller is Pal Loring."

The murmur of their voices was quickly lost in the hushed room. It was as if the silence were a physical presence, devouring all extraneous sound, and leaving a void in which Loring's voice fairly crackled. The scene, however, was no longer as of the dead. Men leaned forward at the tables, watching. And now—most significant of all—Ling Fu, the proprietor, came to life and, like an awakened idol, left his place beside the bar and with noiseless tread moved forth into the room. He went straight to the great blue Chinese lamp, took it down, and carried it to a safe place behind the bar.

"Still lookin' for your mother?" Dunkirk asked

slowly. His voice carried into the duskiest, stillest corner of the room.

Loring's eyes seemed to draw together, and he looked white about the lips. "What do you mean?" he asked carefully. Then, rather patiently, "That was boyish foolishness that I've given up long ago."

"I wouldn't give up so soon." Dunkirk's tones began to have a rasp, like a file. "It's common talk that she's still somewhere on the Road. And there's an old hag over there in the corner that looks like she might be the one."

He pointed with his thumb toward a drunken moll —human flotsam on this coast of despair—who sat toying with her glass not far from them. Without the slightest change of expression, Loring turned and looked, and casually looked back into Dunkirk's face.

"Swine!" he said crisply.

He spoke without anger. Indeed, his tone was almost cheerful. Yet he had selected the word with delicate precision—the exact term that suited Dunkirk, and which would enrage him far more than the usual fighting words. And the answer was just what he might have expected—a snarl of fury and the volcanic violence of a blow.

But the blow did not go home. Loring's head and upper torso gave a curious little half-turn—a motion that to an old Bengalese at a near-by table recalled the leap of a mongoose from under a cobra's lash. Dunkirk's big fist slammed impotently past its target.

But why did Loring fail to reply? Why did he wait, when his opponent's wild blow gave him such an opening? The crowd could not understand. The old Loring that they knew would have smote back like a gorilla.

The simple truth was that his thoughts were busy elsewhere. He was wondering at the surprising awkwardness which his foe had displayed. It was not like Red Dunkirk almost to lose his balance in the first second of an engagement. Whence came the terrific momentum of that wasted blow—a weight so heavy as to swing the fighter forward at his foe's mercy? And Loring smiled faintly as the seeds of suspicion took root in his mind.

Dunkirk flung back and struck again, but he was not so reckless now. Loring answered, and the fray began in earnest. It was as if the spirit that rides in the typhoon had been blown in through the window.

A whisper and a crackle flew over Ling Fu's dive. The flood of energy let loose by those two magnificent bodies seemed to supercharge the air. The faint haze of smoke began to eddy and whirl in the room. As yet there was no rough-and-tumble fighting. The battle was still clean and trim. The two men stood on their feet, striking with the regularity of trip-hammers.

The shadows danced grotesquely. The onlookers did not leave their seats, but their widening, lurid eyes made them seem to close in, nearer and nearer in

a blurring circle. The silence closed in too. The rustle died away, and all that remained was the hushed uproar of battle—the labored breath, the hoglike grunt of a man hard hit, the smack of bony fists on flesh.

The matching seemed to be fair. The old Swedish-American who had complained at first was satisfied now. Loring's lean body possessed a marvelous agility; his fragile-looking hands dealt deadly and shattering blows. On the other hand, Dunkirk was no clown. He did not again lose his balance. Indeed, he was a savage and remorseless fighter, worthy of the name he had won.

A little restless stir began again, and swept over the crowd. Passion leaped from heart to heart. These men who sat at the tables lived to fight—even more than they fought to live—battle was their glory and their kingdom—and the voltage in the air was reaching the danger point. At any instant the fray might spread. The sailors wanted only a ghost of an excuse. Then the issue, clean-cut now and sweet to cherish, would be lost in chaos. The room would explode like a volcano.

Loring decided to hurry matters if he could. He wanted to put out the little white-hot flame of this conflict before it started a general conflagration. He was not primitive enough to enjoy a roaring brawl in a Shanghai dive. Meanwhile he could take hope in London Nick, who was setting an example of calmness

to his fellows. He sat lolling on his bench, twirling his monocle about his finger.

The fan-tan game had now ceased, yet there was a certain activity beyond the tables. Ling Fu still slipped about on catlike feet. He had put away the ship model, and now he was taking down the picture of the Flying Dutchman from behind the bar. It was well to put it out of the way of a thrown bottle or bench. Finally, he began to put out the lamps.

These were oil lamps, and if suddenly upset, the fight might end in fire. The room darkened as one lamp after another flickered and went out. Now the fray was a dance of shadows—leaping in and out, grimacing, cavorting, and prancing like the goblins of delirium. At last there was only one lamp left burning. It was immediately above the fighters, where Ling Fu could not reach it. The men now strove in dimness, and only their faces, like leaves in a moonlit forest, reflected light.

Presently the little lines about Loring's eyes puckered with a question. Once more he had occasion to wonder at the amazing weight of Dunkirk's right hand: a short blow which he had taken fairly to make way for his own stinging left had almost jarred him off his feet. Did the Scot's right biceps possess almost superhuman power? But Loring had another explanation.

He was not a novice at this craft. He knew facts of life and tricks of trades that are not often told in

books. He began to try to catch sight of his foe's right wrist. And presently a vague suspicion grew into a certainty.

Half concealed under his cuff, the Scot wore a narrow wristlet of leather. Loring instantly identified it as the sliding loop of a black-jack, the death-tool of the thug. The handle of the weapon was thrust into his sleeve; the shot-weighted end he clasped in his fist. This was what gave such crashing power to his blow.

"You will, will you?" Loring murmured. "Well, I know some dirty ones myself."

But it was not the words that made Dunkirk suddenly desperate. It was the smile that went with them —a smile of strange mirth, of self-mastery, of inner victory. He had known from the first that he could not conquer Loring by fair means. Now he knew that treachery was likewise powerless. He was slowly, steadily wilting under his enemy's driving attack. So he decided to make a last dreadful effort.

He let the black-jack fly forward in his hand. Using it as a club, he struck with all his power. It was a blow to crack a man's skull as a hammer cracks a nut.

But it did not. Loring was expecting just this. Instead of dodging, he leaped to meet the attack.

And now the silent crowd saw a trick that would grace a carnival. It was the sort of thing that calls forth cheers even from an enemy. Although a few of

the grizzled Magellans had beheld it before, none had ever seen it done better, or with more terrible effectiveness. Loring's arm seemed to shoot out like a lance. His hand grasped Dunkirk's wrist, and falling backwards, he pulled his foe on top of him. And then, his back to the floor, he lashed up with both feet.

The whole action was marvelously smooth and quick. It was as if the two men had trained for a tumbling act. But Dunkirk did not bow and take his applause at the finish. As Loring's long legs straightened out, the Scot was literally hoisted into the air.

There is known strength in a man's arm. That strength is as a child's compared to the might of his thighs. Dunkirk soared like a man of straw. His shadow leaped grotesquely on the wall, and he crashed down across a table. Not soon would he rise to carry on the fight.

For one half-second the room was deathly still. Faces were blank and white as in a dream. The rocking walls seemed to settle; the light quivered no more. And then one man jerked forward on his bench.

This man was London Nick, and there was an intense expression on his face. It was a look hard to describe, but which had been known well enough, and talked of in a whisper, in the Red prisons of Petrograd. His lazy hands snapped shut, and his monocle no longer spun about his fingers. He spoke sharply—just a word or two out of the corner of his mouth—and now he seemed to have forgotten his beloved Eng-

lish, the words rasping forth in an alien guttural tongue. And instantly the two men who still sat with him and a third man at a near-by table sprang up from their seats.

So Loring was not to be spared. He had won his fight and thereby won his right to go forth through the door he had entered, but instead he was to thrust out through the little black gate of No Return. He had not been fast enough in regaining his feet. As he lay gasping, exhausted from the effort of his last mighty offensive, Nick's men lunged toward him.

They pounced like wolves at the sight of fallen prey. In the half-light it was a nightmare scene—bodies crouched so low that they seemed to move on all fours, darting shadows, sudden and shocking tumult. A table upset with a crash. A bench hurled in frantic violence by a drink-mad sailor felled a Swede whaler who was just rising from his seat in Loring's defense.

The room was no longer silent. The crowd was no longer still and watchful. The spell in which it had been held so long broke up like ice in an arctic river. With two exceptions every man in the room seemed to be in motion, hurled forward by the same hurricane of passion. One of these exceptions was Loring, now struggling to his knees. The other was London Nick, who sat quietly watching with cold, bright eyes.

Nick's bullies must attack without their master's help. Yet the pack was already large enough. In this

room were other men who hated Loring, who feared him and were jealous of him, and they had not let this chance pass by. In the end they might have to answer to Loring's friends, but that would be in the dim future, and this was the blood-red present. The victim himself would not exact vengeance. Plainly he would be demolished before his allies could reach his side.

Loring tried to gain his feet, but the first onrush bore him down. And what would be his fate under the feet of that ravening gang would be neither fair to see nor to hear described.

But Fate has strange ways. Loring had not yet fulfilled all that had been written for him on the tablets of the gods. Fate brought Captain Storkersen through the front door just as the attack began.

This man had not come to fight. He had been summoned here for a business talk. But he did not desire that Loring's lips should be closed before the talk began.

Storkersen was of great size. He was hardly fifty, and the fulness of his strength was yet to be measured. A lesser man would have snatched up one of the teakwood benches. Storkersen seized a table.

He caught it by one leg, and his huge wrist held straight as he swung it around his head. Then with a roar that rose above all the tumult of the fight—a bellow as of the sea itself in storm, a war-cry like that of his own Viking ancestors when they sacked the Kentish coast—he waded in.

He used his strange weapon not as a club, but as a scythe. He swung it in front of him, back and forth, and it cut a swath through the moiling gang as a blade cuts wheat. And thus the fight that had begun in treachery ended in glory.

The storm that had risen to such a height in a few brief seconds died away. London Nick scarcely had time to return his monocle to his eye. It was only a moment before Loring and Storkersen were running together down the wanly lighted road; it was less than an hour before they were sitting, snug and safe, in the cabin of Storkersen's big auxiliary schooner the Jutland. Their business engagement had been delayed hardly at all.

"You t'ink I coom along about der right time, vat?" Storkersen took time to say. He laughed loudly. And then, eager for praise: "And maybe you t'ink I'm a pitty goot man."

"An extraordinary good man," Loring answered quietly. "So good, that I've got over any doubts I had at first. When I sent for you tonight, I was still wondering whether or not I'd let you in on my deal. Now that I've seen the way you can clean up a dive, I've decided that you're just the man to help me clean up four million dollars."

CHAPTER III

BEFORE Loring spoke again he glanced out over the bay. Ship lights burned; night-flying birds wailed in the hollow of the sky. Ah, here was the motif of his life! A ship, and a gull's cry on the wind. He smiled a little—a strange mirthless smile, ever beyond Storkersen's ken—as the truth went home. He was a bird of passage himself. He was a ship without an anchor.

Always he had been a rover. His earliest remembrance was of a valiant prow over a green sea. Reared on a ship—a disreputable poacher that followed the fur-seal herd through the long wet loop of the Japan Current—naturally he had grown up an adventurer. Lord God, it was a wonder that he had not turned out much worse! It was a marvel that he was not a London Nick or a Red Dunkirk, instead of a man who could look the sun in the face.

He had no heredity to boast of. While many men in these backwaters of the earth did not know their own fathers, Pal Loring did not know his own mother. This fact was the excuse for Dunkirk's insult in Ling Fu's dive. Because as a boy he had tried to find out which one of the harbor women had given him birth, because

he had questioned Gay Street Hattie—who knew the doubtful pedigrees of the underworld from Rio to Rangoon—and the old genealogist had talked, his story had become common gossip. Yet he had not succeeded in his search. As he had grown older and wiser, he had ceased to look.

He could piece out the details to please himself. The elder Loring had probably taken the woman from some water-front resort to keep him company on a long cruise. She had borne him a child, leaving it in his care when she had gone back to her old life. On the other hand, Pal might have been born not under the ocean moon, but in the ray of the Scarlet Lamp. In either case, the old man had shown unusual regard for his obligations. When sailors dance, they are not always so willing to pay the piper.

And the elder Loring must have felt remorse. He had never told the boy the facts of the case. He had pretended that Pal had possessed an honest mother—a sure-enough mother like other boys—who died at sea. And Pal, because he was a dead-game sport from the time he was old enough to think for himself, pretended to believe him.

Early he had learned the truth of life, and the falsehood of shame. Before he was twelve years old he realized that the old man's description of his mother was never twice the same. He had noticed, in that mute way of children, that there were none of her photographs in the cabin or the chest, and that her

very name changed from time to time. Perhaps his father had meant to tell him in the end. But he had kept putting off the distasteful duty, and suddenly it was too late. On a night of tempest and roaring waves, he had been struck by a falling spar. And he went out on the wind in silence.

No, not quite in silence. There had been the beginning of confession. "Pal, I didn't do right by you," he said. And then he had been summoned to tell his story at a higher court.

The old man had always called him Pal. It had come to be his name on seven coasts. And such he was to the old, brutal sealer—a pal in wind and rain, shoal water and on the deep. The two were pals more than they were father and son.

Yes, David Loring had done his best. An illiterate, hard-living, hard-drinking man, he had never done an unkind thing or said an unkind word to his little boy. Perhaps that was the reason, now that the seed came to fruit, why Pal Loring's deeds and words were also kind. No labor had been too great if Pal was to benefit thereby, no gifts too rich, no sacrifice too exacting. The child's education had been looked to from the first. It was regularly part of the seamen's duties to tutor him: the "ship's lawyer" teaching him his letters, the supercargo his arithmetic, the whole crew—and who could teach it better?—his geography. He learned the history not of one country, but of all. Ole, the one-armed Swede, told him of Gustavus Adolphus;

Tony Motilla described the glory that once was Spain; old Jock Campbell, the freckled man who drove the vessel's auxiliary engines, rolled the "R's" of Argyll and Ayr. He gained the broad viewpoint that befitted a child of the open sea. What does the albatross care about the boundary posts between one nation and another?

When Pal was sixteen, his father and his father's ship were taken away from him. David Loring went to Davy Jones's locker, as had been decreed from the first; the schooner was confiscated by the Yankee government as a pelagic sealer. The boy took to adventuring on his own hook. And because his heart thrilled to the trumpet, and because his blue-white-diamond eyes flashed back the gleam of naked steel, he specialized in wars.

He was never a peace-time soldier. He enlisted only for the duration of conflicts. And since there was no shortage of wars, and since he worked at them steadily with only an occasional vacation at smuggling and temple-looting, he was a seasoned veteran long ago. Now, at the age of thirty, he was far known, not only as valiant commander, a man to lead a regiment of tattered motley-armed rebels into an entrenched and seemingly impregnable position, but also an authentic military expert. No longer need he hunt for jobs. The jobs hunted him. He no longer enlisted, but was granted surprisingly high commissions.

Some men fight for glory. Pal Loring fought for

sport and spoil. But no one ever called him a fair-weather friend. It was a fact—to be explained only by some queer quirk of chivalry in the nether regions of his soul—that he invariably cast his fortunes on the weaker side. He was always the friend of the under-dog. This was true even in the Great War. He was one of the few men who had realized Germany's power—he knew of her well-drilled myriads and her brimming arsenals—and in that dread August of 1914, he thought that she would win. So he rushed up from the Balkans and procured a commission in the little Belgian army. He was eighteen then, and a subaltern: but by the time the four red years were over, he was a captain and Legionnaire. As on many occasions since, he had helped to make the losing side the winner.

He did not look to the right and wrong of a cause. National problems and prejudices were nothing to a sea-creature like himself. A superior enemy was in itself enough to make him fight like a patriot. But because the superior force is almost always the aggressor, it happened that Justice usually marched before his banner.

Sport and spoil! The same lure that has launched so many ships, inspired so many armies! But he did not pillage the poor. Rather he took indemnities and tribute, and the occasional treasure-trove of a rapacious heathen prince. Nor, save in war itself, did he shed blood.

And were his adventures impelled by still another

motive? Was there some rainbow other than the yellow gold of plunder and the red wine of strife? Loring did not know, but he remembered the cry of the seagull he had just heard. A bird of passage! A ship without an anchor! Yes, it seemed to him that a voice called faintly, *"Come away, Pal Loring, come away!"* A voice beyond the horizon which he could never find!

Why, he was the Flying Dutchman himself! He could never round the Cape of his desire. His battles did not fill his eager, leaping heart, but only hushed its clamor. For two years, now, he had wandered with a harassed army through China, but he had not found the voice. He had found only the blood-red hours, the strong drink of slaughter. He had brought back a canceled brigadier-general's commission and rich booty, but not satisfaction: the whisper had eluded him, and now he must look again.

So to his talk with Storkersen. His far-circling thoughts swept home. Looking up—he saw that the big Norwegian was grinning sheepishly. Of course. He was still trying to see the point of what must be one of the younger man's jokes. Even adventurers of Loring's stamp did not speak of four million dollars in earnest.

"Storkersen," Loring began calmly, "have you ever heard of Treasure Island?"

The skipper's smile dimmed and passed off. A look of heavy disappointment came instead. . . . It was not like Loring to carry a joke so far. To summon a sailor

man to a meeting, and then talk moonshine to him. Yet there was a clear blue-white spark, like the facet of a sunlit wave, in his sea-blue eyes. There was no mirth in his face, except the amused half-smile with which he always acknowledged the supreme joke of existence. Perhaps Storkersen should not yet despair. Perhaps this was something more than foam blown on the wind.

"I don't know no island by dat name. And if you means some island of buried treasure, I don't take no stock in it. Old Lief Anderson, he spent two year—"

"We shall dispense with Lief Anderson." Loring leaned forward a little. "Storkersen, I mean the real Treasure Island, that every sailor knows about. Not a place of buried treasure, but a place where the treasure lies on top of the ground, to reach with your hand and feel." His face suddenly flushed, and he spoke tensely. "To reach with your hand and take!"

Simply, briefly, Loring explained his great plan. Storkersen was a man, one of the lords of the twilight seas, and he need not mince words with him. The treasure was the great seal herd of Pribilof. Himself and Storkersen were two, and in Shanghai were forty more who could be relied on in a mighty hazard. In Storkersen's ship the Jutland they could sail northward —invade a certain island, take command of a certain radio station, and—practically safe from interference in the arctic wastes—reap a czar's ransom in fur!

Storkersen's eyes gleamed, but he was a practical

man, and he asked questions. Was not the island well guarded? Why had not the great venture been attempted before? And what would Storkersen's own harvest be—wealth without end to squander in the dives of the water-fronts, or a felon's cell in a Yankee prison?

Wealth without end! Of the million animals in the herd, there were two hundred thousand prime pelts, and these would bring twenty dollars apiece in an obscure fur mart, well known to them both, on the gray Siberian coast. For the use of his ship, Storkersen would receive a sixth of the catch; Loring himself, who had lain sleepless a hundred nights to plan the raid, and who now would back it with some of his own money, would take an equal share. The remaining two thirds—fifty shares of the total seventy-five—would be divided among the officers and men of the crew.

It was true that the islands had been raided before. In the brave days of the past, when Russia had owned the herd, poachers' ships had often skulked about in the Bering fog. But these poachers were only sneak-thieves. They risked their lives and their ships for a mere thousand pelts. It had remained for Loring to propose the decimation of the entire herd.

The islands had no adequate protection against a strong force. In all there were not more than thirty white men living on St. Paul, and the native population —dark-skinned Aleuts—would be clay in the raiders'

hands. No trading ships visited the island, and the Yankee revenue cutters would not be looking for land raiders. They were largely a sea patrol—and besides, Loring had made plans to avoid them.

But what of the moral aspects of this thing? Loring was an adventurer, and a gentleman of fortune, but he had kept to a certain code. . . . Now his strange eyes flashed. He explained that in this great raid he would be only winning back his own. In spite of the fact that the seals are marine animals and therefore the property of cosmopolitans like himself, Uncle Sam had monopolized them, and with his warships driven the seal-hunters from the sea. He had made treaties with other nations to help him guard the herd, but he had made no pact with Loring, who was a seal-hunter by inheritance.

"You t'ink dat when Uncle Sam takes away your right to kill 'em at sea, you've got der right to get back at him by killin' 'em on land," Storkersen summed up. "Is dat it?"

"He invaded me, and by God, I'll invade him!" Loring's voice rang in the quiet room. "Besides, Storkersen, the very magnitude of this thing keeps it from being criminal. To invade an island and hold it for a month—to seize a U. S. wireless station and capture its personnel—to subjugate a native tribe and take four million dollars' worth of spoil—that isn't crime, it's war. It will be the greatest buccaneering foray since Morgan sacked Panama—the supreme piratical adventure of modern times."

CHAPTER IV

LORING belonged to a bolder age. In more venturesome days, he would have been the Lord High Admiral of a robber nation's fleet. When he talked, men saw visions: new stars lured; voices called; strange lands beckoned beyond the curve of the sea's breast. . . . The boom of waves on unguessed shores . . . the clang of steel and the echo of a battle shout . . . the gleam of a high-borne flag . . . most telling of all, perhaps—gripping a man like fever in his vitals—was the promise of loot. The ring of gold pieces clinking one upon another.

Storkersen would go. He would join the enterprise. The great reward was worth the risk of a prison term. Besides, a force like a fair, quartering breeze was already sweeping him along.

There was much to attend to. First was the recruiting of a capable crew. Storkersen already had more than twenty men on the Jutland, but not all of these were suited to the work impending. Some were too timid, others too desperate. Besides, not twenty men were needed, but forty. And *men* they must be.

Loring and Storkersen went down into the byways of Shanghai, and brought back the best that this city

of strangers had to offer. There was no careless choosing. Every recruit was a picked man, gentlemen of fortune aforetime. And they met, a motley crew, in the Jutland's cabin.

For first mate there was Sydney Bill, a lank Australian who had sailed with Storkersen for ten years. For the second mate there was Lars Johanessen, himself a licensed captain and until the treaty of 1911 a pelagic sealer of wide repute. For technical men there were McCrae, who had long driven the Jutland's auxiliary engines and who had raced the vessel through many a blockade, a staff of five assistants, three of whom were openly stolen from other ship crews, and, of equal importance, two expert radio operators.

One of the latter was Dutchie Schmidt, who had occupied the Jutland's wireless room for so long a time that he seemed literally one of its mechanisms. Yet while he was a living switch-key at sea, in fair weather or foul, in a shoal-water brawl he was an ally not to be despised. The other operator was a figure of mystery. A short, broad man with an oxlike expression, he always seemed to be listening to distant crackles in the air. His name was Haycox, and rumor said that he had deserted from the wireless room of a British man-of-war.

There was Templeton, who had smuggled the Dulmera Diamond out of India. There was the "Prince," who had once engineered a middle-sized rebellion in

Brazil. There was Smith, whose fight with an Irishman named Michael in a Saigon dive was famous from Nome to Cape Town. In that famous battle, Michael thrust his thumb into Smith's eye-socket. In retaliation, Smith seized his foe's free thumb between his teeth. "Bite, blast you," Michael had cried. "Gouge, damn you," was Smith's answer. And afterwards the latter was known as One-Eye Smith, while among his friends Michael was called Four-Finger Mike.

Among the other recruits was Gordon, an American renegade. Gordon was a stupid man, but his gorilla-like arms made him deadly in a fight. There was Black O'Neil, a terrible Irishman, and Spike McCracken, a former rum-runner out of Vancouver. There was Tubal, a New Orleans Negro, and Tom Sing, a half-caste Malay. There was Pete, an Alaskan sourdough, and an Aleut named Pavlof who knew, as a weaver knows his web, the deeps and shoals of the little lost isle to which all would fare.

There were Danes and Norwegians and Swedes. Without such, the ship could not sail. There was a French count who had left his home as the result of a duel, and an Austrian doctor who had left a scalpel in a noble patient's breast. There were smugglers and remittance men and gentlemen of the coasts, but there were no out-and-out cutthroats, and no one with a known record of serious crime. Inasmuch as they all talked more or less English—one of the provisions of

their choosing—and as they had all seen service before the mast—they could be welded into a compact fighting machine.

Loring stood before the crew and held them with his eyes. His voice filled the room, and the little rustling, breathing sounds of the assembled men died one by one away, as he unfolded the details of the expedition. There were certain articles, he said, which all must sign. Such was the pirate practice since Kidd sailed out of London Town.

According to these articles, the spoil was to be divided into seventy-five shares. Of these seventy-five, one third or twenty-five shares were to be split between the two chiefs of the expedition, Storkersen and Loring himself. Of the remaining fifty shares, the two officers, the chief engineer, and Haycox, the wireless operator, were to have two shares apiece, for these four men had special and difficult work to do.

The sum total of the above was thirty-three shares. Of the balance of forty-two, each of the thirty-eight remaining members of the crew was to get one share. The extra four shares were to be awarded as prizes at the end of the voyage, honorariums for special service done, the lucky men being selected by a vote of the entire crew.

"The trip should make rich men of you all," Loring said. Flashing-eyed, he waited for the words to sink home. "The total prize should be four millions of dollars. This sum, divided into seventy-five, is fifty thou-

sand—a rich fortune for every one of you. You say, in your thoughts, 'Perhaps we will fail.' I say to you, 'Yes, we may fail,' but what great reward has ever been gained without great risk, and when will the world offer another such chance to enrich ourselves?"

Yet no needless risks would be taken. Plans had been made to keep close track of the coast-guard vessels, and if the prows came too close, the Jutland could vanish in the fog. Captain Storkersen would remain skipper of his ship. Loring would have supreme command of the land party and the conquered island, and his word would be law.

The distribution of the treasure would be as fair as any man could ask. Since Loring was lending money to the enterprise, and Storkersen his ship, they were entitled to great profits. Yet they had not asked for half of the spoil, but only for a third. Thus mutiny against the two commanders would hardly pay: each man could increase his own share only by a fraction.

There was one of the articles which Loring read twice. It provided that no officer or member of the crew should commit, on any excuse, a crime of blood. If such a crime was committed, the offender should not only lose his share of the profits, but should be left on the island, to Uncle Sam's vengeance, when the Jutland sailed away. This rule would not be modified, or the penalty forgiven.

The men who gathered to sign the articles did not misunderstand. They knew Loring's ways of old. If

they felt secret scorn, mostly they kept it to themselves. Only O'Neil, the black Irishman, seemed to be making mental reservations. And he watched the quay with a nervous expectancy. . . .

To Loring, comprehension came swift and bitter. A foppish figure appeared at the door of the cabin. It carried a cane in one hand, in the other it fiddled a monocle. Yet no one felt like smiling. The eyes of London Nick—cold as a cutlass—never encouraged mirth.

"Cheerio, Loring! 'Pon my soul, you've collected all the rascals of the coast!" he began, in his queer accent and pseudo-English slang. "And as the biggest rascal of them all, I haf decided to go wif you on your trip!"

Loring's thoughts flew fast. Plainly the plans of the expedition had been betrayed. "I don't remember that anybody invited you," he replied evenly.

"Oh, that!" Nick gestured freely with his cane. "I invited myself, bah Jove!" And then, as Loring's face clouded: "Of course I mus' not thrus' myself in where not dezzired. Oh, no, nefer, not on your jolly life. I will gladly stay in Shanghai, and to show I haf no hard feelings, I shall still do everything I can to make the trip a gran' success."

Loring's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "What will you do, for instance, Nick?"

"For eenstance? Oh, I shall arrange for your reception. I have met Little Kris, the Yankee who ees the

big boss at the Pribeelofs, and I shall sen' him wireless that you come to visit him. Then he will be ready to make you welcome, no? Yes?"

For a long second the listening crowd held its breath. Yet Loring gave no sign that he understood the threat, and he lighted his pipe with scrupulous care. "Nick, perhaps I should explain why you weren't invited in the first place," he said clearly at last.

"I would mos' like to know—"

"Because of your reputation. It is said—whether truly or not I don't know—that you're not careful with human life. Now it happens that I don't like killing, and won't have any done on this trip. You may think that is an unfortunate weakness. But let me say this—for you, at least, it's a mighty lucky thing."

"I'll be jolly well damned if I understan' what you're talking about—"

"You understand, all right," Loring assured him solemnly. "You see, Nick, you're not at present in Ling Fu's dive, surrounded by your buddies. You've got a man or two in the crowd—Black O'Neil is one of them—but the rest of the men aren't ready to fight for you—yet. And if it wasn't for my weakness—my scruples against killing—you wouldn't ship with us, nor would you go out that door to warn the islands of our coming. I'd pass a signal to a man standing beside you, and you'd leave us suddenly, with six inches of steel under your ribs."

For a moment Nick stared hard. Then he smiled fatuously. "I see," he said.

"As it is, I'm going to make the usual sacrifice to my scruples," Loring went on. "Since we can't afford to have you warning Little Kris of our coming, we'll have to make room for you on our ship. We'll accept your terms and you'll accept ours—which means that you'll keep your gun in your pocket and be a credit to the expedition, as you very easily can be, if you want to. However, as a compliment to you, I've decided to add one more sentence to the articles."

Loring bent over the script on the desk, paused in thought, and then wrote rapidly:

> It is hereby agreed that Pal Loring, commander-in-chief, has at all times the right to call off the expedition, at any point in its progress, for any reason which he considers adequate; and if any man of us thereafter persists in trying to carry on the expedition, the said Loring has the right to block it by any means in his power, including the warning of United States authorities.

Thus ran the fateful paragraph. As Loring had said, it was a tribute to London Nick—an effort to tie the Russian's strong but bloody hands. Nick's killing instincts might threaten to arise, after the men overran St. Paul, and the sight of prisoners in ropes might recall him to crimson days in Petrograd. The

articles forbidding blood crimes might not hold him, and Loring wanted some vested right to protect the island people.

Was this cowardice on Loring's part? Every man in the room knew better. Not even Nick, sick with his own conceit, made such a mistake. Their leader was not trying to shirk responsibility, but to face it all the more. He stood ready to resist his whole crew—to waken their hatred and defy their vengeance—rather than to surrender his mastery over them; and the paragraph was simply a warning to that effect.

Yet it was something more, too. It was the expression of an intuition so dim that Loring did not know of its existence. This thing that he was about to do was a mighty thing. It might have ramifications beyond his wildest dreams. How did he know what the next month might bring forth; what truths he might learn under the northern stars? So he must not close all his gates behind him.

When the paragraph was read aloud, it was greeted with a growl of anger. By what right did Loring wield such absolute power? Well, since the question was asked, he would strive to answer.

He was the commander of the expedition. He had conceived it, had organized it, and had financed the outfitting of the ship. If for any reason he thought best he should call off the venture, he alone stood to lose. Storkersen and the men could go whaling in

the Arctic Ocean, a trip that would make fair profits. He regretted the necessity, but if the company did not care to go on these terms, it must immediately disband.

Storkersen was the spokesman for the men, and for a long time he stood like an ox in a field. He was grinding the wheat of Loring's words in the slow, heavy mill of his mind. Unlettered he was, this great blond son of the deep, yet he had watched the measured movements of the stars, and he knew the eternal constancy of the sea. Besides, he came of a Nordic race. The love of justice was bred in his bones.

And men do not betray their loves. Rarely do they play false with that for which their fathers have gloriously died. Loring knew that he need not fear to trust his judgment.

And now Storkersen had made up his mind. "It's all right," he said. "If der boss wants to call it off, he can call it off." And then he pushed forward and signed his name to the articles.

One after another the men signed. Nick was the last.

CHAPTER V

THE Jutland took off like a bird, and out of the harbor mouth. In her outer aspects she was a whaler, bound for the icy seas where the bowheads blow. Yet an officer boarding her from a revenue cutter would have found some interesting things. Her crew was larger by half than seemed to be required; and one of her mates wore a monocle on a black tape. In her fo'c'sle furtive-eyed men gambled for surprisingly high stakes.

It did not seem a suspicious circumstance, but only an amusing one, that the skipper had such grotesque tastes in color. The hull was still gray and disreputable, but all the masts and spars were painted a gaudy green. Otherwise she was prosaic enough. No one would dream that she was a haunted ship. Yet, if Loring's fancy told him true, strange forms flitted over her under the waning moon. As she sailed out of East China Sea into the gray glaze of the Pacific, whole crews and troops of ghosts arose from their cold beds in the Spanish Main to rally on her decks. They stood the watch beside the drowsing sailors; they laid their shadow-hands upon the wheel; they swaggered two by two upon the bridge.

There were courtly Spaniards, and gallant French, and dark, terrible Englishmen. Mostly they wore velvets and silks, but one poor ghost—flitting far from a forgotten grave in London Town—had the loop of a rope around his neck. Yet it did not seem to detract from his prestige. Blackbeard and Sharkey bowed low, and swung their plumed hats, when they met him on the bridge. And none of the company were gloomy and wistful as most ghosts are. It was long and long since they had seen a ship of their own fleet, and they seemed to have come home.

Ghost-cutlasses gleamed in their hands, and over the Jutland fluttered a ghost flag. Perhaps it was only a black cloud with the moon showing through, but to Loring it was a sable banner, bearing the emblem of the death's head.

And now the ghosts must shiver in their silks. No longer was the wind warm as a woman's breath. New stars arose; the first of the Aleutian Islands, one of the great chain which forms the palings of the fence between the North Pacific and Bering Sea, appeared on the port bow. And now the whispering company must give way to other ghosts—phantoms not of dead men, but of living, haunting images in Loring's mind, immaterial as the strains of a half-forgotten song.

These spirits were not bold and awesome, but sweet and tender. And so strange they were that at first Loring could not even name them. He only knew tha»

they arose and haunted him at the first glimpse of a green island.

Presently he decided that they were only memories. Fifteen years ago, when he was a boy on his father's ship, he had seen such emeralds jeweling the breast of the sea. Yet it was strange that his heart should be so touched. It was as if such an island had been the background of the portrait of his life; as if his childhood had been bound up in it, with fetters of tenderness and of love. . . . But no land had any real hold on him. Like the seal, he was a child of the open sea.

Nor were tenderness and love attributes of the North Pacific. From a distance the island—like all the others in the chain—looked as if it were covered by close-cropped lawns, the cherished spot of a master gardener. Yet Loring knew, without knowing who had told him, that in reality it was an uninhabitable moor. The grass was so lush and thick that a strong man could hardly force his way through it. Some of the hills were smothered in moss; the lowlands were dank and evil with treacherous marshes.

This was no picture-island of the tropics, to lure him with its ease. It was green enough now, but soon it would be stark and white, ravaged by blizzards. And the green itself looked deadly—like some poisonous philter brewed by a mad chemist. . . . Plainly, his pleasure in the sight was an illusion. The emotion that stirred him was born of some idle vagary.

The ship cruised on through the island chain, far into the sea of mist. Now they were out of the common paths of ships. The fog might lie for days, and never be split apart by a blind bow. Rarely was the silence broken by a fog-horn's wail, and the thin, far cry of a gull was like an overtone to the silence itself. Here Loring saw the first seal of the year.

It was a female, off the rookeries of St. Paul. No doubt she had left her pup on the beach and had swum two hundred miles to her fisheries, later to return with her milk-glands swollen to her young. As the ship came by, she was diving in and out of the swell like a porpoise—a slim, sleek figure, mistress of the sea lanes.

Again Loring was stirred. Perhaps this was merely the thrill of the hunter at the sight of his game, yet somehow that explanation seemed inadequate. He found it hard to think of her merely as a piece of fur worth twenty dollars. . . . But his fellows on shipboard met with no such difficulty. Their eyes lighted, and the ancient lure of loot held them to the rail like moths to a flame.

The ship sailed on, slow-creeping to the north and east, and the seals became a common sight. Sometimes they were seen asleep, riding a wave like a cradle, and sometimes dark thin heads were thrust up suddenly almost under the bow. They did not seem afraid of man. In the long years since the last pelagic sealer was driven from their fishing grounds, they had

ceased to expect the smoke of guns and the hiss and splash of shot. And now the breeding grounds themselves were close—just beyond the low-hung fog.

One of the seamen climbed to the tops. The men waited, tense and still. Loring smiled dimly, wondering at the leap of his pulse, the strange gladness of his heart. Storkersen tramped like a bear back and forth across the bridge; London Nick twiddled his monocle and dandled his cane. Then—"Land Ho!" the cry rang down.

"Whit'er away?"

"Dead ahead. I can yust see der top of Bogoslof Hill and der radio masts."

But armed invasion would not be attempted at once. No such crude tactics were included in Loring's plans. Careful reconnoitering must first be done; detailed preparations completed. As he had explained to Storkersen, this was to be an inside job. The ship backed away, hiding in the curtains of mist, and only one boat was put overside.

Long ago, in the early days of seafaring, when man's speech was more picturesque than it is now, men frequently spoke of a boat as a "horse of tree." Today this term was true in a double sense. The boat just launched was not only the steed on which sailors rode to battle, but likewise the wooden horse that had betrayed Troy. It would carry spies into the enemy camp.

There were queer things about this launching. In

the first place, the seven men of the crew had a noticeably disheveled appearance, as if they had spent two or three days at sea in an open boat. They were not clean-shaven, and their hands were grimy and blistered. The bread tank under the thwart had been opened, and half its contents taken out. The water-casks were tapped, and in spite of the fact that the island was in easy rowing distance, the boat's emergency mast had been raised and her canvas spread. All this was part of Loring's strategy, circumstantial evidence to support a story of mishap. But it was his good sense, rather than his cunning, that barred all strong drink from the boat. Clear heads were needed now; and the roaring nights of wassail and jubilee, which Loring loved no less than his men, were yet far off.

Loring himself sat in the bow of the craft. It was only fitting that the commander-in-chief of the expedition should be the first to set foot on enemy shore. He wore the coat and cap of a second mate. Next to him sat Nick, dressed in the garb of a common seaman, his monocle and cigarette holder out of sight in his pockets.

Yet the Russian's rough clothes did not wholly disguise him. Still he kept his bearing of quiet power. No wonder he had been included in this carefully chosen seven. He was ably fitted for espionage. Besides, Loring feared to let him out of his sight. Nick might have plots of his own—ruthless and crafty—

which might find supporters among the crew of the Jutland.

The third man was Haycox, the broad, short Briton who always seemed to be listening. Except for this mannerism, no one would suspect that he was one of the most expert wireless operators that had ever rocketed a message into the air. The fourth was Lars Johanessen, the former pelagic sealer who knew the St. Paul coast-line, and the fifth was "Soup" Brophy, who knew nothing whatever about coast-lines, but who was an expert on the mechanics of locks and safes. As a matter of fact, Brophy had once been a locksmith himself. For years he had made locks, and for years since, he had broken them. The idea conveyed by his nickname was that Brophy was living "soup," which is, in its turn, the fluid nitroglycerine used by yeggs to break safes.

The sixth and seventh men were Gordon and One Eye Smith. Neither was particularly clever, neither an expert at any skilled trade, yet they had their place in the crew. They would do such heavy work as might come to hand. If there was fighting to be done—not gentlemanly engagements but rough-and-tumble shindies—both would be valuable allies.

The boat drifted off in the fog. With a pocket compass, Johanessen kept the general direction of St. Paul Island. And presently the fog lifted, giving them landfall plain.

The long, low coast before them lay like a shadow

on the gray sea. Vainly in the pale dusk Loring looked for the shining green of the hills behind. Yet he knew he would find it in the morning. Some voice in his soul had promised it; always it had beckoned him, like a mirage on a yellow desert. And it was something more than the sheen of rich grass. Rather it was the eternal symbol of Return—of renewed life, of the winged spirit that rises out of mundane clay, of the recrudescence of the spring. And how was all this somehow in tune with him? What was the analogy to his own life?

St. Paul! Only a volcano top in the emptiness of the sea! Not even trees had come here. Not one fertile seed, containing in the plasm of its cells the sap of a mighty forest, had taken root in these moss-grown ashes. Desolate and wind-swept were the dunes and the dim headlands; frowning and austere the cliffs of the birds and the crags of the sea-lions.

A lost and lonely spot it was. A dreary, storm-ravaged waste of rock, rank grass and sand. Often the winds harried it, and the snows of winter buried it, and the roaring tempests from Bering Strait swept down and smote it. Ever it must be prey to the elements. Now the seas coveted it—lapping its sands, storming its crags, raiding its beaches, only to drop back swirling like baffled troops—and later the ice-pack would seize it with an iron hand. Even now, in midsummer, its winds bit to the bone. The fogs drifted drearily from hill to hill.

Surely this was the Isle of Hate. Surely it was accursed by man and beast. Yet Loring loved it. It wakened in him an ardor that he could not understand.

Suddenly a shiver passed over him. It leaped like a charge of electricity throughout the wondrous labyrinth of his body-cells. He did not attempt to seek its source; to know whether it was awe, or fear, or madness, or the blinding return of a long-forgotten love. He only knew it was the peak of his life so far; that every thrill he had ever known, sought for and fought for with a heathen's fanaticism, in the seven seas and on the hundred coasts, dulled into inanity compared to this.

Why? Because the island had given utterance. The drear fog-blown coast had lifted its voice to bellow at the stars.

Encircling the reefs, the boat suddenly had met the off-shore wind. Borne on that wind, and blown out into the silence of the sea, was a deep roar. It swelled and died away with the pulsing of the air currents, only to rise again in an incredible anthem. It was like a chant of the gods.

"My God, what is that?" Loring cried.

It was Lars Johanessen who answered, and his voice was deep and full.

"Dat's der roarin' of der seals."

As the men rowed up to the reef, the seal roar increased to a deafening clamor. It was like the noise of football bleachers during a crisis in the game. Yet

the only seals in view were a few hundreds swimming in the phosphorescent water—dark, slim forms, each leaving a wake of fire. The densely packed rookeries from which the chorus arose were around a point of rocks.

And it was this chorus, rather than the work in hand, that struck flame to Loring's eyes. No wonder the little school-teacher on the beach mistook the tall, wandering figure for Captain Webber's ghost. And here on the dunes the two met for the first time—the silent, awed man, and the girl with the sea mist on her lashes and the fog on her cheeks.

CHAPTER VI

THE trail into the village was wild and rough. It led through the moors, down over dunes of shifting sand, and across a sandy beach where plover shrieked. Yet Loring followed it with surprising ease. His foot seemed to avoid of itself the boulders hidden in the grass; and his questing spirit hurried even ahead of the guide. He seemed to guess the little trail-turns before he reached them, as a musician guesses the strains of a song just before they reach his ear.

The village was no doubt prosaic enough in daylight. Its native people had forsaken the grassy burrows which mark the Aleut, and lived in little white shacks built for them under government supervision; the few larger administration and store buildings were white, gaunt and severe. Yet now, in the midnight dusk, the village lay like a place in a dream. The huts, laid off in straggly rows, were like sepulchers of the dead; the ghostly fog clouds drifted between, and the clamor of the seals had dimmed to a distant chant, unutterly weird and strange. Towering over all was the Greek Church, an inevitable adjunct to every Aleut village. Its minaret-like belfry and its double cross

banished all reminder of the new, crude West, and transported the scene into Holy Russia.

Loring could not shake off, even by the most contemptuous introspection, the trance that held him. He was conscious of emotion—warm, thrilling, and jubilant—but what was its deeper meaning, and why it should rise in him at the seal chant in the dusk and at the sight of a sleeping village, he could not imagine. He started as if from revery as an old Aleut man trudged up the village road and halted at his side.

The mere fact of the Aleut's presence at this time was not surprising. It is the natives' way to go abroad at all hours of night, and what missions they perform no wise white man ever tries to guess. Perhaps the old Indian himself did not understand what vague promptings had sent him forth, no more than the house dog understands the calls that creep in on the night's breath and summon him to the moonlit meadows. Yet even Little Kris, the administrator, who knew the Aleuts as well as any alien may hope to know them, was puzzled by the man's subsequent behavior. He did not peer and walk on to his shadowy assignations. He showed none of the Indian's typical stolidity. Instead, he appeared to start, then leaned forward and searched Loring's face. It might be that he muttered a little—at least he made some subdued guttural sound—and his deep breathing whispered in the dusk. Then turning, he hurried off in the direction he had come.

"The old fellow ees in a hurree, bah Jove!" Nick commented, his voice cool and bland in the half-dark. "What ees it about you, Loring, that make him leave so queek?"

But Loring had no time to answer. In his talk with Little Kris, he was gaining an entirely new outlook on his enterprise. Plainly its outcome would not be so certain as he had thought at first. Except for the perfection of his plans, it could very easily turn out a tragic failure. Even now, the intrusion of a small amount of bad luck might wreck the scheme entirely. Why? Because of the inevitable "personal equation." The man confronting him—this Little Kris of quiet manner and calm words—was a foeman worthy of his steel.

The chief of the Pribilofs would fight for his seals. If given the slightest chance—the feel of a rifle butt against his shoulder, or even the stock of a barking army pistol in his hand—he would take rich pay for his fur. Not in vain was he the choice of a strong man in Washington—the bureau chief who controlled not only the seal herd but all American fisheries—and likely his own subordinates, here on the island, would be of this same stamp. Johnston, Ellis, and Big Kris, Doctor Eberhard and young Page—all would need the strictest guard. It was well for the enterprise that these men as well as Helms and his sailors, and even the white skin-fleshers sent up for special work by a

great fur-house in St. Louis, were to be disarmed before the raid began.

Fortunately, he had an able force of spies. Most of them had now gone to their appointed quarters to sleep, but morning would find them at work. Haycox, the wireless operator, was already busy. When Loring completed his code telegram to Storkersen, Haycox made its filing an excuse for his first survey of the radio station.

He gave the message to a slim-waisted boy in American sailor's uniform, then lingered to talk to an interested group of men. Later he talked to Helms, the chief petty officer in charge of the station. He showed a callow interest in the wireless equipment—listening with a puzzled face to the rattle of the keys as the operators sent out their regular nightly reports to headquarters. Sometimes he even asked questions as to the men's duties. He had thought of joining the navy himself, he said. . . .

It was careful, skilful work. In a few days he would know the full routine of the station, and be able to take full command of it when the occasion arose. Meanwhile London Nick must get track of all the high-powered armament on the island—hunting and army rifles—and, at a given signal, be prepared to spike them.

Lars Johanessen had done his work well so far—he had steered the spies' boat to the beach without mishap—but now he must devote himself to a larger task.

First he must make the acquaintance of Cap'n Andy, of the U. S. Fisheries launch Eider. Gaining the skipper's confidence, he must learn the schedule and operation of the craft so that later he could command her himself.

"Soup" Brophy must attend to the locks and bolts. He must find out how to enter, in the deepest hour of night, any room of any building on the island. Gordon and One Eye Smith must run errands, obey orders, be on hand for heavy work, and particularly stand ready to apply force where it was most needed.

Loring would do no actual spying himself. It was not for the commander-in-chief of the expedition to listen and peep and betray. But he would assemble the reports of his men, plan the campaign, and make decisions. In the meantime he would enjoy the adventure itself—look at the green hills, feel the fog on his lips, hear the voice of the seals.

And it proved particularly pleasant to forget all "stratagems and spoils" in Hilda's kitchen. Before he left, he won the girl's promise to show him the rookeries on the following day. The high sun wakened him at seven, and he went forth into one of the brightest mornings that the old islanders could remember.

The fog had blown away, and the breast of the sea was fabulously jeweled. The hills of St. Paul were green beyond a mad artist's imagination. And somehow this brightness got into Loring's heart, making him again forget the plot that had brought him here.

As he went forth with Hilda it was as a boy bent on some guileless and delectable adventure.

As the two neared Garbach rookery, the clamor of the seals rose to a deafening roar. And when Loring peered over the cliff onto the roaring beach, he beheld a sight to thrill his dreams for months and years to come.

Here was a veritable city of seals. Although Garbach was only one of the dozen or so large rookeries located at intervals on the St. Paul coast, its long beach was literally black with the squirming, fighting, roaring animals. There were old bulls, vast and brown, each surrounded by his harem of sinuous females. There were thousands upon thousands of seal pups; and at the edge of the rookery were the idle bulls, males not quite full grown or not yet of sufficient strength and prowess to win a harem of their own. Back on the hauling grounds was a densely packed mass of "bachelors," bulls too young to waken jealousy in the savage hearts of the old beach masters. In the surf in front were thousands of swimming seals.

It was a scene of utmost confusion. The big bulls were threatening each other, each closely guarding his own group of cows. They roared, they barked, they blustered and blew out clouds of white steam; they coughed and shook their pointed heads. Evidently they put not the slightest trust in their wives—always pushing and threatening them, herding them into a compact group, and snapping and snatching them if

they tried to escape. The females that had already dropped their pups and bred again were permitted to leave the harems and enter the water, yet they were thoroughly manhandled and bullied before they won right of way. And occasionally rival bulls met in violent and bloody fray.

There were a few sleeping cows, their heads thrown back and pointed to the sky, but mostly the harried females were given no rest. On the outskirts of the rookeries the idle bulls waited to snatch them away the instant their masters' guard relaxed. Some were nursing their pups; others, black and sleek and newly risen from the sea, were battering their way through the nurseries of the young, knocking the poor little animals helter-skelter, in their haste to find their own offspring.

Even the pups were wriggling and rolling. Some of them tried to fasten to the teats of the passing cows, but with painful results. No mother would tolerate any baby but her own, her cruel teeth flashing at the "bummers." And how any of these identical-looking cows came straight to her own pup in the crawling mass of thousands, all as like as peas out of the same pod, was a mystery which Loring would never attempt to solve.

Hundreds of seals were playing in the surf, crawling upon the shining rocks only to be washed off again, rolling and leaping in the breakers. Hundreds more were coming and going on their long fishing trips to

distant banks. And Loring swam beside them in his fancy, and voyaged with them in his dreams.

The seals were in constant motion with perpetual clamor. Not only the battle-scarred and bleeding beach masters made outcry—roaring forth their deep-toned challenges to their rivals—but the cows bleated and bawled, and the pups whimpered and barked. The whole scene was of vivid, thrilling activity. Instead of supine and helpless creatures, the seals proved to be lithe, supple, and keen-living; and their fur rippled with unimagined beauty in the sunlight.

Yet were they just a mob? Were these moiling thousands beyond the reign of law? Loring soon knew better. The laws that operated here, in these far, lost, roaring rookeries of the Pribilofs, were just as certain, just as inviolate, and some of them as inscrutable as those that kept the sea in its basin and the tide in its bounds.

One of these laws was plain to read. Loring did not need the girl's explanation; he glimpsed the obvious truth, and because it found an echo in his own philosophy, his heart leaped. Might is right. Everywhere on the roaring beach he saw this law exemplified. Might is right, and to the victor belong the spoils.

In the first place, the bulls have won their places on the beach purely by might—by the strength of their bodies and the fierceness of their fangs. They hold their separate domains by the same means, and woe

to the young weakling bull who ventures among the harems! True, such an intrusion does occasionally take place, but never twice by the same animal. Might is right—so when an unmated bull, crazed by passion, stampedes down through the rookeries, he pays a high price for his trespass. The first beach master intruded upon catches the hapless visitor in his cruel fangs, tussles him, tears him, and hurls him, with that prodigious seal strength of which no man knows the limit, out of his domain. Falling, the half-dead animal is sure to strike in one of the adjoining harems, where he will meet the same reception. And when the game is done, the thing that is left can scarcely be called a body. It is simply a ragged, shapeless object that the seals sniff at and forget.

In the breeding season, the bulls give way only to a might greater than their own. They are scornful of hunger. This strongest instinct of all life, ordinarily greater than fear, is not a sufficient urge to dislodge the beach kings from their thrones, and from May, when they first haul out, until August, when they are lost in the sea, they do not once taste food. They are equally contemptuous of unarmed men. None of the sealers dared enter their boulder-strewn domains—only the bachelors on the hauling grounds were driven and clubbed for fur—and death itself, the absolute and ultimate might, could alone silence their triumphant and challenging voices.

Might is right. Yet, Hilda explained, the law was

not carried to its utterly ruthless conclusion. Indeed, in its operation it was tempered by even greater laws. For instance, the preservation of the species was ever looked to. The swarming pups were trampled on, but never intentionally slain. Even the bachelors had rights—avenues were left whereby they might go back and forth to their mistress the sea. Plainly, the savage old bulls owed allegiance to a might greater than their own. And how did this fact affect Loring? Why did it give him pause?

Through the clamor of the seals he heard Hilda talking quietly at his side. "There are more and more every year," she was saying. "If the sealing treaty is renewed between the nations—and you know Japan is opposing it—there will soon be as many seals as there used to be, when Pribilof first discovered the islands."

His lips tightened a little. "You mean the treaty forbidding the killing of seals at sea?" he asked. "I suppose you think that such a treaty is justified—that the downfall of the herd was due entirely to pelagic sealing."

"I don't think it—I know it," she told him vigorously. "If you knew the slightest thing about seals, you'd know it too. Originally there were three—four—perhaps five million seals. 'They came and went in legions that darkened all the shore.' Then the pelagic sealers came. In 1911 the herd had been reduced to about one hundred thousand seals.

"Pelagic sealing was not only a wasteful practice,

but downright wicked." Her sober lips and bright eyes showed how close was this theme to her heart. "The ships preyed mostly on the female seals as they went back and forth to the fisheries, and every time they got a skin they killed not one seal, but three. They killed the mother, her unborn pup, and her living pup on shore. In every case the shore pup died—none of the other mothers would give him milk. And if you had seen what the old man here used to see—thousands upon thousands of dead pups on the beach, and thousands more crawling from mother to mother trying to beg milk, you'd never defend pelagic sealing again."

"But how did the United States have the right—"

"Right!" The girl's lips drew in scorn. "Why haven't we the right? They're our seal, aren't they? And even if we didn't have the right—which no sane man will question—at least we have the might. At such times, when thousands of helpless animals are starving to death on the beach, and when the survival of the herd is in danger, just might is reason for our government to sweep the pelagic sealers from the seas. That's what we did, and if occasion arises—if Japan won't renew the treaty—we must do it again. What's might for, except to use in defense of the weak?"

Loring's cheeks flushed faintly, but this was not all resentment. Part of it was a vague emotion which seemed to disavow his own cause—perhaps simple admiration and sympathy for the girl's spirit. He

began purposely to lead her on. "But how can you prove that the treaty has helped matters?"

"I can prove it by a hundred thousand fat pups on the beaches, instead of that many skeletons," she answered. "I can prove it by the fact that ever since the treaty was adopted in 1911 the herd has increased. It was a hundred thousand then. It's almost a million now."

"But isn't America going pretty far when it says 'our seal'?" Loring asked. "I've always maintained that they are the world's seal—that they're birds of passage, belonging not to one country, but to the high seas."

"You just maintained wrong, that was all," she answered bluntly and calmly. "Look about you, and you'll see for yourself. Do you notice anything strange about the rocks?"

"They're all worn—smooth!"

"Yes—for a hundred yards back from the rookeries. Great boulders worn down flat. You know what did it? The brushing of soft fur for hundreds and thousands and hundreds of thousands of years."

Suddenly the girl stood up, and her cheeks were pink. "Of all the wonders of the seal, this is the greatest," she told him quietly. "Almost since the world began they have mated and had their young here on the beaches. In the fall they go far, far out to sea, but when summer comes they come swimming back, the roaring hordes. They won't go any other

place. They can't be driven to any other shore. You can shoot them and club them and kill them, but as long as one pup is left alive, he'll come back to the island of his birth. And then you deny that they are 'our seals.' You deny the American's right to protect them on the sea!"

And the thought went straight home. To Loring it was a revelation to shake the very foundations of his purpose. He had justified the expedition on the ground that the seal were children of the high seas, even as himself, and that no landsman had the right to monopolize them. Now he knew that they were sailors that went back and forth to sea from their home port. . . . The salmon to his river. . . . The wild goose to her marshes. . . . The spring green to its hill. . . . The vagabond to his native village. . . . The children to their mothers' arms. . . .

So the analogy between Loring's life and that of the seals seemed to be proved false. These clamoring myriads enacted the wondrous miracle of Return—companions to the wheeling stars, the waxing and waning moon, and all the moving hosts of heaven and earth—while Loring was an anchorless ship adrift on the seven seas. Unlike these mariners that thronged the beach, he claimed no home port.

Then why did his heart glow at the sight of them? Why—in spite of the greedy purpose that had brought him to the island—did he seem to stand, blessed and redeemed, among his own people?

CHAPTER VII

HILDA found a glossy pup asleep on the rocks, and catching it by the flipper, she handed it to Loring for inspection. It was a male, and plainly its spirit was already that of the beach master. It yapped, it snarled, it turned and twisted in a persistent attempt to bite at its captor's hand. Loring held it at arm's length, meanwhile yelling for the girl to take it back.

And when, laughing, she took the little demon from his hands, he was suddenly sobered. "You know, I was unreasonably scared of that pup," he told her. "I seemed to know just how those tiny nail-point fangs would feel in my skin."

"If you did know, you must have an uncommon imagination," she told him. "Most people have to be bitten once or twice to find out what a wicked tear they can make."

"I don't want the experience, thanks. I seem to remember being convinced a long time ago. I must have been bitten by a dog, I guess, in early childhood. Of course, I'd never had dealings with little *kotiki*—"

She whirled toward him, with round eyes. "What did you say?" she demanded.

"Why, nothing—"

"You said 'kotiki.' That's the Aleut word for the baby seal. How did you ever know it?"

For an instant he was startled. The name had come as naturally to his lips as his own name. Then he smiled and shrugged. "I suppose I've heard the word somewhere—perhaps from some man who had lived here on the island—and just happened to remember it."

Presently they walked on out to the point. They no longer moved in file, but side by side—good friends already, if only from their united interest in the drama of the seals. Besides, they seemed to get on well together. Hilda's frankness and common sense delighted Loring, and his wide knowledge of the world and its ways fascinated the lonely island girl.

They soon found that they had many tastes in common. Both of them liked the damp wind on their faces; both had thrilled at the moon's track on the sea. Both loved the simple and worth-while things—good food, strange sights, action and romance and adventure—and neither was erratic, freakish, or inhibited. At present they were in the first stage of a warm companionship. Where this companionship might lead only the girl dared dream; Loring's stern will shut out thoughts of the future as a drawn shade shuts out light.

They looked at the jellyfish and the sea-urchins cast up by the tide. They watched the surges climbing up the shelves of the cliffs. They stalked the foxes that

rose and barked at them from every rocky mound; they rejoiced at the myriad birds—burgomaster gulls and curlews and auklets and little *poochkies*—that thronged the cliffs. Loring forgot his mission on the island. His years of too full living slipped away from him, and he was a child again.

The air rushed sweet and cool to his lungs; the hills flashed green to his eyes. Indeed, everything about the island was just right—just as he had wanted it to be—just as he had seen it in a dream that he did not know he had dreamed. Even its bleaker aspects appealed to him with a sense of fitness. Its drifting fogs did not darken him, but moved him like floating chords of solemn music. Its moaning sea, beating on the rock and lapping on the beach, echoed not sadly, but with a strange happiness in his heart.

Arctic poppies in the grass; monk's-hood blowing, and the lush carpet of wild wheat . . . dunes, dim headlands, treeless moors, sunshine on salt lagoons . . . pulsing winds and cries of birds and strange, deep, sudden silences . . . and always and everywhere, an eternal motif running through the silence, the roaring of the seals!

St. Paul seemed to welcome Loring with a mysterious and loving kindness. If he were a spy and an invader, it did not find him out. And now he found himself wishing that Fate had dealt differently with him, and that he had come as a defender of the island, rather than its despoiler. He could no longer quicken

to the thought of spoil. In spite of his hard, cold realism—his frank disillusionment of life—he wished that the land's welcome were deserved, that he need not betray it, nor stab the breast that now beat so warmly and lovingly to his.

But remorse had come too late. He had made his bed of plots and conspiracies, and now he must lie in it. Besides, it was not for the captain of forty men to be turned aside by a whim. And a whim it was—this dull regret that haunted him—merely the vagary of the hour.

Again he drove it from his thought. He began to watch the thronging seal. A hundred thousand of them were at present in his sight, veritable silken gold. "This is the original Treasure Island, isn't it?" he observed to Hilda. "There must be two million dollars' worth of seals on these rookeries alone."

"Yes, breeding-stock and pups and all," she answered practically. "There's probably a fourth of that amount in prime skins, if you count the females." She paused, and her deep-blue eyes shone with excitement. "Perhaps this is Treasure Island in a greater sense than you ever dreamed."

He turned to her, knowing that she was about to make some startling revelation. Yet he felt no desire to hear it. His conscience—strong-voiced yet, in spite of the life he had lived—made him want to silence her. Somehow he hated to think that he had won this girl's confidence so easily—that she would betray her secrets

to the traitor in her home. "Don't tell me anything you shouldn't," he warned quickly.

But plainly he had no cause for alarm. He had forgotten what a practical-minded, clear-headed young lady he was dealing with. "Don't you worry," she told him. "I'm not going to take any risks with a man I've known only one day, no matter how trustworthy he seems. The secret I'm going to tell you will be known to everybody on the island in a day or two, and I've done everything necessary to protect my own interests. Mr. Loring, you wouldn't dream that you are standing within a hundred yards of a mining claim, would you?"

"I don't see any monuments—"

"There's one just beyond the point of rock. The others are out of sight over the hill. I've put up my notice, and I've recorded my claim with the commissioner. And what kind of treasure do you think I'm going to mine?"

"I can't imagine. This doesn't look like gold country."

"It isn't gold. It's something more beautiful than gold, even if it isn't quite so valuable. You spoke of 'Treasure Island.' That's the right name for St. Paul, if there ever was one. But its treasure doesn't come from the rocks, but from the sea. Do you remember the song that Ariel sang, in 'The Tempest'?"

"I remember a lot of Ariel's songs. We had a

drunken bo's'n on my father's ship who could quote Shakespeare by the hour."

"I mean the song about the king's death:

'Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of his that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.'

"I thought of that, even though it doesn't exactly fit the case, when I made my find a few weeks ago," she explained. "Now come with me."

She led him onto the moor, and lifting aside a loose block of turf, she drew out a hornlike object, three feet long, and gray in color. When she put it into his hands, he found it surprisingly heavy.

"It's ivory," he said solemnly.

"Yes. Walrus ivory. Of course, it isn't the first that's been found on the island. You see, the walrus used to have their rookeries here the same as the seal—in uncounted thousands. The natives have already found a bed of ivory on Northwest Point—a cache worth a great many thousands of dollars. But I've found a bed ten times as rich—a mine of ivory!"

His eyes began to have a steely gleam. Perhaps this was the same glimmer that flickered under Pizarro's black brows, when he saw the temples of the Incas. "You found it here under the grass?"

"Yes—and that's the big surprise. Always before the caches have been found in beach sand. But, you see, this was all beach too, at one time. Either the water level lowered, or the sand was built out by wave action."

"And how were you smart enough to look here?"

She laughed triumphantly. "I just did some hard thinking, that's all. Of course, I was always a treasure seeker. I've helped the natives hunt for ivory ever since I learned to walk. The first thing that struck me was that this point is a natural landing-place for marine animals. The currents set in here. True, the best beaches are full of seals now, but I felt sure that before the walrus herds were killed off at sea, they must have come here. They're bigger and stronger and smarter than the seal, and naturally they'd take the best place.

"I looked in the sand and didn't find anything but seal teeth. Then I decided that the beach was too new—that there must be an older beach farther back. I looked here and found the ivory—a deep layer of tusks. There are at least five thousand skulls—which means fifty thousand dollars' worth of ivory and a fortune for mother and me. As soon as the sealing season is over, I'm going to hire the natives to dig it out for me."

"And this is how you happened to be here on the point last night, when our boat landed?"

"Of course. I was looking over my claim, choos-

ing a time when most of the natives are in bed. Now you see that our meeting wasn't a coincidence at all. I have visited this place almost every night since I made my find—and the same set of the currents that brought the walrus here, decades ago, drifted in your boat last night."

Presently Loring discovered a surprising thing. Without apparent cause, his attention had wandered from the girl's talk; his eyes were no longer full of her ivory treasure. He had been distracted by a queer tenseness, like electrical vibration, in the air.

Loring was a particularly sensitive organism. He saw not only with his eyes, but with his skin; he heard not only sounds, but voiceless presences; he not only smelled, but felt the air. Partly this was because of a natural alertness—not only his every-day faculties, but those more distant psychic senses for which men have no name were sharp as seal teeth. Partly it was the result of training—of life amid constant danger. Now he knew, without knowing why, that all was not well with this little meeting on the moors. Some outside sinister factor had entered in.

He turned slowly. Behind him, standing so near to the crags that he was practically out of sight, was London Nick. The Russian was dressed as neatly as his rough clothes would permit; he dandled a reedy stalk in place of a cane; he was smiling pleasantly.

Loring made no perceptible start. "Are you looking for me?" he asked.

Nick shrugged. "On the contraree, I am here to see the seals," he answered blandly. "I happen to come up behin' the rocks and hear voices. 'Bah Jove,' I say, 'it ees my friend Loring—with a lovelee companion. The lad ees a fast worker, on my honor.'"

"And I suppose your 'honor' didn't permit you to hear some conversation not meant for your ears?" Hilda asked.

The Russian bowed. "Not on your jolly life! What confidence you impart to my friend Loring ees no concern of mine. But I would be blind indeed if I did not recognize the interesting objec' in your hand."

"You're welcome to recognize it. But don't let us stop you if you are going out to the point to look at the seals. Mr. Loring and I were just about to start back for the village."

Loring's lips parted in amazement. He had hardly expected his companion to fight her own battles so spiritedly. Not only her words but her voice showed that she saw through Nick—that she distrusted him, disliked him, and intended to discourage him. Yet she feared him too. Otherwise she would have concealed her feelings and spoken gently. In challenging him, she was challenging herself; his confident manner and bland smile had put her on the defensive.

Nick walked on, swinging his improvised cane, but the morning was spoiled for the two friends. Hilda was vaguely, secretly uneasy; Loring saw storm clouds

in the sky of his future. It was quite like him that he should hunt Nick up at his earliest opportunity and force the issue.

"Nick, you seem to have a mistaken idea of your duties," he said crisply. "Your job is to spy on the island, not to spy on me."

The Russian's eyes moved slowly and rested on Loring's own. They were insolently calm, and his smile was candor itself. "It was an accident, belief me," he said. "I was merely taking a first glance at our seal."

" 'Our seal,' eh? They're not our seals till we get 'em in the ship, and any number of things can happen before that time. Of course you saw the girl's ivory."

"Oh, to be sure! Quite a prettee stake, ees it not? Of course we will take it too, when we leaf the island."

Loring's face was still and calm. "That will lie with me, I think." Then, conceding a little in spite of himself: "I don't know that there's enough to bother with—"

"Fifty t'ousand dollars' wort? That was what she said, I think, in the course of the conversation. Bah Jove, Loring, you haf become haughty, ees it not? I mind the time that you risk' your life in a Burman temple for half such a sum. True, it would not be much divided among forty men—"

Their eyes met again, and now they clashed like shields. "Very little indeed, so why bother with it?"

"You are not usually so dense, little one. Who

knows of this ivory but you and me? We split it together—worf of a pearl necklace itself. And speaking of pearls—"

The other smiled faintly, but with such a grimness that his foe was startled. "Speaking of pearls?"

"It has just occur' to me perhaps I will let you take all the tusks for your own, and I—will take pearls. One pearl in particular, as it were. What you think?"

Loring's eyes began to have a cold, snaky shine. "I think, my friend Nick, that you're talking the worst rot I ever heard from a man's lips."

"You think so? Not on your jolly life! Listen, comrade. Surelee you haf not forgotten the traditions of the buccaneers. It was always the pirate privilege to pick up a pearl here and there to play wif on the voyage. Gordon and One Eye Smith haf already picked out a maid apiece from the natif village—black pearls, as it were—and the other men will desire to do the same. When they sail away wif the fur they will also take any other things worf taking on the island—after the immemorial pirate custom—later to drop them off in a Siberian port."

"I follow you so far," Loring said. "The pirate custom you speak of—and it's a whalers' custom too—is going to be broken to smithereens. But what's this about the white pearl?"

"She will be mine. I take her instead of my share of the tusks. The ivory of her skin ees spoil enough for me; the gold of her hair ees treasure enough in

itself. And as to the pearls between her lips—I could spen' many nights wif pleasure diving for them! Listen to me, little father. You can do what you jolly well please with the men and their natif girls. But do not come between me and my simple pleasures. I haf tol' you what I intend to do. My mind ees made up."

Loring made no immediate reply. He looked away, and seemed to be listening to the roar of the seals. "But men change their minds occasionally," he observed at last.

"So?"

"Quite so. You'll discover that fact later. And to prove my point, I'll cite an example."

"Of how you made some man change his mind? Ah, but that man was not London Nick."

"No. To tell the truth the man was myself." Loring's voice was leisurely and low. "Nick, you know how I always felt about taking life. I used to say that I would never kill a man in cold blood." He paused and smiled, but his smile was evil and sinister. "Well—*I've changed my mind.*"

Then as the Russian's baneful eyes glowed and paled and glowed again, Loring spoke his brief warning. "Nick, if you so much as lay your filthy hands on a white girl on this island, I'll kill you like a snake."

CHAPTER VIII

GORDON and One Eye Smith had been given what seemed an easy task. It was to spy out the village and to report the natives' habits, nature and ideas to Loring. Surely the Aleuts were simple as children —friendly, smiling and hospitable—and they would give up their secrets readily. Yet at the end of the second day the two spies approached their chief, hemmed and hawed, stuttered and stammered, and reported absolutely nothing of the slightest value.

It was true that the doors of the little white shacks hung frankly open. It was true that the solemn old men and smiling old women were always flattered and pleased to stand at their thresholds and visit with strangers. It was even true that the young squaws seemed willing to flirt a little, in their queer, deliberate, cold way. Yet their habits, nature and ideas had remained as obscure as the crest of Bogoslof in the fog, as the track of the seals in winter.

But Loring need not have been surprised. Little Kris himself, a scientist at heart, rather than a sealer, had spent literally years trying to know the Aleuts, and even now his total understanding of them could be written large on a dime. True, he knew exactly how

they acted in the presence of the alien white. But when the Alaskan night closed down—when native met with native, and the only eyes to see were brown and sunken, not blue and bright—he could not even guess how they spent their time. He had learned to talk with them a little—in their guttural, gobbling language—but what was the burden or even the subject of their endless chatter and cackle among themselves he could not imagine. He realized their strength and their weaknesses: their capacity for blind devotion as well as for somber, sullen, furtive hatred; the strange fervency of their worship at the knees of their priest, combined with an utter, shocking lack of moral ideas; but never, never did he know their souls. Sometimes, in despair, he was almost ready to think that they had no souls. At other times he wisely remembered that East is East and West is West—and that here on this midway island, where these late wanderers from Asia lived side by side with their conquerors from northern Europe—the twain could never meet.

Sometimes he thought they were a most uninteresting people. They had no original music, their only songs being the hymns they learned in church. They had lost their native dances, and when they met in the schoolhouse on winter nights they slid about, two by two, under the lamps, to the jazz tunes of the whites. They possessed no folk-lore, but only a collection of haphazard superstitions about ghosts, sea-lions, foxes and cormorants. They had practically no knowledge

of the outside world, and were absolutely without interest in it. Then why did they remain inscrutable and apart? Why did he desire to stay among them, helping them, working with them, studying them?

The truth was that they were a mystery second only to the seals. Instead of a dull mass of animals, they were a people of bewildering contradictions. For instance, although the outside world was a blank in their minds, and they never saw a newspaper from one year's end to another, yet they managed to keep up a spirited conversation among themselves, interminable as the gossip of blackbirds in the Carolinian reeds. Although their superstitions were haphazard, some of them—particularly those evolving about the death and expected resurrection of their old white chief Captain Webber—showed a love and a loyalty worthy of the best in the land. And their waltzes and fox-trots and one-steps which had taken the place of the frenzied prancings that used to precede their inter-island wars were not mere awkward mimicry of the whites, but dancing of a high order—marked with skill, grace and ease.

Even their lack of folk-songs did not mean they were a stupid and uninspired people. They had simply lost touch with their tribal history. They were not indigenous to this soil, but had been forcibly uprooted from their homes on the Aleutian chain and picarooned to the Pribilofs to work as sealers. The wonder was, not that they failed to blat and shriek the typical Indian

songs, but that they cared to sing at all. It was strange that the fogs and storms of St. Paul had not silenced them long ago.

They were always amazing Little Kris. They were always breaking the rules he tried to lay down for them. Just when he began to think that he had begun to know them, they would reveal themselves again as the unfathomable "half devil and half child." He was particularly at a loss when he approached Ellis, his veteran assistant, the second day after Loring's arrival.

"Ellis, what's got into the natives?" he asked abruptly.

This man of sixty, who had been on and off the island for thirty years, shook his head humorously.

"Don't ask me. I only know they're up in the air about something."

"Up in the air! Why, they're walking on it! You'd think that the whole village was drunk on kvass. They're closer to hysteria than I've ever seen them—going around with glowing eyes and dazed looks. It is a terrific emotional awakening of some sort; but what in the devil has caused it?"

"It's come on them since Loring and his crowd arrived."

"Yes, and no doubt there's some connection, but what is it? They were not nearly so excited when their bishop arrived last year. You remember that they all ran down to kiss his hand, and then went to work, sober as can be. Now all they care to do is

gather in their houses and talk, or else go down to their church to sing and pray."

"Couldn't you find out something from their priest?"

"I tried to, but you know he can't talk English, and I didn't get very far with him. He shrugged his shoulders and said something about 'native superstition.' Then I collared old Carp, who will usually talk your arm off, but the old fellow swore that he didn't know a thing about it."

"He lied."

"Of course he did. He's one of the ringleaders in the celebration. Ellis, why can't we get next to our people? Why won't they confide in us? Are they afraid we'll laugh at them, or is it just a barrier of race that can never be crossed?"

The barrier of race! An invisible silken cord, yet taut as wire! Hilda had cause to think of it—of the gulf of misunderstanding between the brown and the white—when she walked with Loring down the village road. Carp, an ivory carver some seventy years of age, came bowing to his door.

He nearly swept his hat on the ground. Then, shaking hands solemnly with Loring, he slapped himself on the chest and pompously pronounced certain Aleut words.

The white man turned curiously to his companion. "What did he say?"

"He said that he was your brother. That sounds

simple, but really it is rather complicated—and rather mysterious. 'Brother' to an Aleut means all kinds of things, and one white person's guess is as good as another. They have brothers by adoption, and originally they had brothers by totem—the Indian lodges made up of blood relatives on the maternal side. In this case I think Carp meant to honor you—very highly indeed. If we could only know what was in that old man's mind, we might be very much astonished."

Later in the day Hilda learned of another puzzling happening. When she met Loring at the Fisheries' library, she noticed that his boots had been carefully blackened and shined. "How come?" she demanded. "You can't go on any more tramps with me if you're so particular about your shoes."

"Shoes are the least of my worries," he told her cheerfully. "But this is a beautiful job, isn't it? It would start a panic in Greece. But don't give me the credit for it. The old native who takes care of the dormitory shined 'em for me."

Her eyes slowly widened. "You don't mean Phineas?"

"Yes. That's his name. Obliging old fellow, isn't he?"

But she was not to be distracted. "Then you asked him to do it?"

"I certainly did not. He insisted on it. I thought it was wasted effort, considering the wet grass we're

tramping through all day. I tried to tip him and he almost cried. I've never seen such service."

"No one else has, up here. Mr. Loring, you certainly carry some powerful charm in your pocket. You know who Phineas is?"

"He seemed to be a nice, humble old Aleut—"

"Humble! He's practically the head man of the village. He leads the services at the church. He's proud as a peacock, and why he should get down off his high horse for a visiting seaman I can't imagine to save my life."

Loring was amused, but only casually interested. He continued his survey of the island. He met Big Kris, a bewhiskered Norwegian who was in charge of the by-products plant which, in time, would manufacture oil from the bodies of slain seal, and Johnston, a little dark man who was the resident agent of St. Paul. Later he was introduced to Page, Johnston's assistant, and the operator of the short-range wireless telephone between St. Paul and St. George.

He did not meet Wing until noon of the third day. When Wing's shrunken, soft yellow hand clasped his he realized that he had delayed the exercise of an important privilege. This man was not only the best cook that the Fisheries' mess had ever been lucky enough to hire, but also one of the island's traditional figures. He had heard the deep seal roar in the days of the commercial companies—when the sleek bands rose out of the sea in millions—and he had spent a

winter in St. Paul for every little line in the ancient yellow leather of his face.

Wing was a Cantonese. This meant that he came from the most enterprising province in China. Also, he was a man—and therefore Loring warmed to him. Then why did he linger in this little lost island, working for moderate pay? The answer was that St. Paul had come to be his home. He had seen half a score of agents come and go. His old bones were used to the fogs; he could not sleep save to the beat of the sea. Canton was now a city in a dream—vague, far off, its roar an echo, and its temples a shadow.

Besides, he was doing well for himself. He drew his pay, month on month, year on year, and he spent little of it. More remunerative still was his traffic in seal glands. These were bought from the native sealers, dried, and sold in China as an elixir of youth. If he were imposing on the credulity of his venerable countrymen, the fact did not hurt his conscience. Certainly his product should be as effective as monkey glands. The seals are the living exponents of vigor, youth and strength.

He seemed to start a little when he first saw Loring. His slanting eyes narrowed, and a glitter seemed to pass over them and swiftly pass off. At once his habitual smile flashed back across his lips—calm, friendly, inscrutable as the smile of a Billiken.

"Wha' you name?" he asked, as if he had not heard clearly.

"Loring," the white man answered. "Pal Loring."

"Pal?" Wing echoed the word in a puzzled tone, then his face lighted and he nodded secretly. "This you fils' visit Plibilof?"

"Yes, but I hope to come often from now on."

"You pletty young. You have plenty time. You thilty—thilty-five yeal old?"

"Thirty, to be exact."

"Wha' you fathel name? Maybe I know him. I know plenty sailel men."

"My father was David Loring. He sailed into these parts sometimes."

"Les? I tly lemembl him. Now you want clup coffee, pliece pie?"

Loring devoured the food with enthusiasm. He thanked Wing, and departed; and he did not know that the little lean Chinaman stood at his window a long time, nodding, smiling and whispering to himself.

One swallow does not make a summer, and one little mystery does not make a romance, but a half-dozen mysteries, one after another and all vaguely connected, will make even a practical-minded young schoolma'am begin to dream. Yet it took the violence of storm to strike home the answer. The truth came not by calm reflection, but a voice on the gale, a trumpet-blast over the billows.

The adventure had the most simple beginnings. The fog swept away, and a huge sun burst boldly into view.

Bering Sea looked serene as a mountain lake. The Furies that tormented it had broken their whips, and had been summoned back to their master who reigned at the pole.

The glassy waters, and the calm sky, and the feel of the sun on her hair and throat made Hilda restless.

She had admitted to Loring that she was a confirmed treasure hunter. She had not told him, however, that her expeditions were the despair of her mother and the principal worry of the entire white population of the island. She had neglected to state that she was also a dreamer, a born adventurer, who could not resist the challenge of the rainbow. For a long time she had been thinking of the possibilities of ivory on the beach of Sea-Lion Rock. Now that weather conditions permitted, she decided to make a brief dash to the little isle and return between tides.

Down on Reef Point, between the rookeries, she kept her sea-horse, a small craft of unusual design. It resembled a canoe, but its walls were of sea-lion skin instead of birch-bark, and it was covered over by a deck of the same material. There was a hole in this deck for her body to slip through, and when she tightened it around her, the craft was practically watertight.

Riding forth in it, she seemed some strange figure of mythology, half woman and half keel. No wonder the villagers regarded the little ship with awe. It was not of their own make—the Aleut skin boats were open,

like dories—and indeed, it came all the way from Point Barrow. An old whaler had spied it floating upside down, had picked it up and presented it to this blond-haired girl of his own race. It was only a detail—nothing to mar Hilda's joy in the gift or make her superstitious—that the boat had been occupied when found. Riding in it upside down was an Eskimo brave, his long hair like seaweed in the water. His icy bays had betrayed him, and he had hunted the hair-seal for the last time.

The craft was an Eskimo kaiak. Hilda had acquired a surprising mastery over it, and when she launched it and paddled away, old Ellis was haunted by visions. He saw again the igloos clustered on the bleak shore of Kotzebue Sound—just as he had seen them when he chased the bowhead whale—a floating berg in the distance, and a darker girl of a darker race riding through the surf.

As Hilda launched her boat she was in a glorious mood. The sea was one vast sparkling jewel, the breeze a rough kiss on her cheek. She did not stop to think that there might be other factors in her happiness—perhaps the mere presence of the visitor himself. She lost herself in the sweet rhythm of the paddle, and danger and death were spirits beyond her ken.

She landed safely on the islet, sent the sea-lions slipping like huge logs into the water, and spent an interesting two hours hunting for ivory. The sun dropped down through the postern gate of the world; the sea's

blue changed to purple, then to gray. But it was no ordinary twilight that finally called her from her work. It was a weird green dusk that made a goblin landscape of her familiar isle and sea. She looked up startled. A huge green cloud had risen in the west, like dust thrown up from the wheels of the chariot of the sun. The sea still slept, but a moan arose from its deep breast as if its dreams were troubled. The sea-birds began to waken in the cliffs, soaring about in frenzied flocks and wailing in despair.

Yet neither the murmur of the sea nor the weird cries of the gulls seemed to break the terrific silence. The seal roar, beating off shore, was not like sound, but rather an everlasting enchantment of the night. . . . Throbbing air. . . . Still, strange shadows. . . . Suspense. . . . Danger. . . .

But Hilda kept her grip. She came of a race that has battled with the sea for three thousand years and more, and the green cloud rising in the west was an old, familiar foe. In her dreams she had fled before it—sails swelling, gray seas racing by, and the Viking flag straight as a rod in the howling wind. If the gods of the weather gave her time, she must flee now.

She looked up and she looked down. She yearned to the home shore, five hundred yards away, and her darting gaze swept the barren crag on which she stood. Should she try to live out the storm on Sea-Lion Rock? There was not the slightest shelter for her—not a hovel or a cave into which she could climb. If the waves rose

high enough, they would wash her away. If the gale struck full, its terrible snatching arms might hurtle her into the sea. At the least the long night here would expose her to rain and cold almost past endurance.

The long night! Yes, and perhaps a dozen nights thereafter. The roaring boorga—the hurricane of the Pribilofs—was not always a brief caller. Sometimes it locked down on the sea for weeks upon end, and no ship could leave the shelter of the hill, and no life-boat dared put to sea.

On the other hand, she might have plenty of time to paddle home. The gale was poised, ready to strike, but the blow might not fall for several minutes more. If she could make half the distance to the shore she would be somewhat sheltered by the reef, and thus could no doubt go on in safety.

Her decision took only a second or two. Her thoughts that showed the way flashed to her mind like a light. She ran to the beach, shoved off, and climbed into the cockpit. Above her the green cloud spread and billowed. Below her the gray sea panted in terror.

But the storm would not wait for her. Its moment came, the signal sounded, and the leash that the wind-gods held snapped free. The gale struck like a falling battle-ax. The sleeping sea wakened with a howl; the air seemed to explode. . . . Passion . . . violence . . . chaos . . . disaster.

The storm did not strike the girl fairly. The blow fell beyond the reef, and its long point sheltered her

to some degree. If her craft had lived through the first impulse of the wind, it might have gone on to safety. As it was, a resistless hand seemed to snatch it out of Hilda's control. It tipped, all but went over, skidded sideways, and crashed into the fanglike edge of one of the outlying reefs which the girl was just skirting.

Through the yells of the wind she heard a sound as of ripping canvas. The tough hide parted, and the water leaped savagely through. Instantly her little cruise was done. The boat was not merely punctured, but demolished; in one beat of the seas it had ceased to be. Without wasting time to strike once with her paddle, Hilda leaped for her life.

She disengaged herself from the clinging skins. A wave that was just thrilling into motion swept over her. It was icy cold, for an instant taking her breath and almost paralyzing her. Her nerves crackled as from a powerful electric shock. Then, after two strong swimming strokes, she found herself clinging to the reef.

Fortunately the waves were only beginning to roll, or else she would have been swept away. Churned and pounded against the rock, she would have been destroyed as surely and as utterly as the sea-horse she had ridden. Quickly she struggled up, to find herself on the top of a rough gray crag.

She gasped, tightened her hold, and for a second more held in abeyence the terror that was sweeping over her. Again she looked up, and again she looked down.

Again she yearned to the home shore, and with narrowing, terror-lit eyes glanced down to the cold rock on which she clung. Last of all she looked to the waters beneath—rocking—swinging up toward her—reaching up to seize her—rolling and roaring up to cover her at last.

The shore was now only a hundred yards distant. She could see its dark line in the murk. Yet it might be a hundred miles, for all her power to gain it. As the twilight dimmed, the shore seemed to draw farther off. And the seas reached ever nearer. The first little waves, vanguard of the white-maned squadrons that were hurrying in around the point, leaped up and wet her with their spray.

The rock on which she clung was one that the seals loved. In good weather they liked to climb up to its crest, poise, scuffle with their fellows, and dive into the sea; but now they had yielded it to the storm. They knew the fate of any living thing that tried to cling to its gray face through the night to come. And Hilda knew too. No blind faith nor childish hope could spare her the truth.

She knew the way of the west wind. It would slowly work around the point, and the waves would slowly, steadily increase in height. Now they only threw their icy spray upon her, but presently they would lap at her face and at her clinging hands. Then they would begin to dash over her, one after another, higher, stronger, fiercer, and at ever-diminishing intervals.

Already she was suffering from exposure. In spite of the fact that terror had dulled her—with that strange mercy which softens even the worst disasters—still she felt the savage sting of the cold. Later would come exhaustion, numbness, twilight consciousness. Her clutching hands would relax. And then . . .

If help came, it must come soon. The village cove was already storm-bound, and even the sturdy Fisheries launch could not work its way around Reef Point. The only craft that could possibly reach her was the Jutland's life-boat, which lay on the beach not far from her own landing. And when the wind worked round a little more, even this stout craft would be useless.

Faint hope indeed: slim little chance, if there was any chance at all. Six or seven white men would be needed to work the boat. By what possible circumstance would so many happen on the beach in time? If she were seen at all, it would likely be by natives. And the brown men, though fair oarsmen in fair weather, could never be led or driven into seas like these.

What was left? Hilda knew only too well. Child though she was, tonight she gained a woman's high-born courage to face truth. Today she had hunted for treasure, but she had not found it. She had known girlhood's longings, but they had not come true. Now she could go searching in the pearl-beds of the deep. Now she could lie in even stronger arms than those that clasped her in her dreams, and on a broader breast.

CHAPTER IX

IT was not much more than a chance that Hilda's mishap was seen from the shore. Michael, one of the young Aleut sealers, had been on Garbach rookery when the storm first threatened, and had run down to the east beach to take care of the Jutland's life-boat. From this point he had seen the girl's departure from Sea-Lion Rock, and, a moment later, the wreck of her kaiak on a crag.

At once he had started to the village for help, yelling as he ran. Fortunately, he was not obliged to go all the way. A gang of sealers were on the killing grounds just beyond Garbach, and Michael's cries brought them running up the dunes.

Quickly they gathered around the newsbearer. They made a closely packed group, black figures on the wanly lighted moor. Michael was out of breath, and at first could hardly tell his story. When the words did come, they were an unintelligible jargon of Aleut, Russian and English.

"Steady." This was Ellis's voice, cutting through the uproar and the wind's blast. "Talk English, Michael. What has happened to Hilda?"

"She drown!" was the terrified reply. "Anyway,

her boat she wreck, she cling to rock. Maybe she fall off already—"

If the gang had been made up entirely of natives, probably they would have wheeled about and raced to the village for guidance. Luckily, they had three of their white men with them. Not only Ellis accompanied them today, but the agent Johnston and Big Kris. Of the chiefs only the greatest—Little Kris himself—was missing. And the white man they might need most sorely of all was absent too. This was Doctor Eberhard, at present busy with a patient in the little one-room hospital of St. Paul.

At once the men fought their way to the east shore. Ellis, a man past sixty years of age and stiff in joint and limb, somehow ran in the foreguard. And because he had known Hilda almost since she was a child, his face looked haggard and ghastly in the green light of the storm.

Presently they were standing on the beach, looking out into the dark sea. For a moment that seemed an hour they strained into the dusk. And then a cry rose in Ellis's throat.

"She's still alive," he shouted. "I can see her dress."

It was true. Now all of them could make out the white glint of the girl's sailor middie. She was still clinging stanchly to her crag. The waves that had begun to break over her had not yet beaten her down.

Johnston, the white agent of the Indian village and the island, at once took command. With a ringing call

he rallied the gang, then led them fifty yards down the shore to where the Jutland's boat lay beached. Swiftly he directed its launching—strong hands and willing shoulders lifted and righted the boat and pushed it to the water's edge. The horse of tree quivered throughout its thews and stood ready to race away.

"Big Kris, take the stern," Johnston yelled in the blast. "Ellis, you don't get in on this—I'll take the bow myself. Five of you fellows jump in, and the rest help us off."

And now, for the first time, the life-saving machinery seemed to stop. The work had been smooth, swift and efficient so far, but now there was a strange breath-taking pause. True, there were plenty of men making ready to push off the boat. Indeed they fairly crowded each other in seizing the gunwales and lifting. It was likewise true that Big Kris stepped calmly and quickly into the stern seat appointed for him. But of the five Aleuts who had been ordered to man the oars not one stepped forward.

Only for an instant did the three white men stand inert and dumb. Then Ellis whirled, his lip drawing up and his dog-fang cropping down. "Don't you hear, you cowards?" he barked. "Tumble in that boat before I kick you in."

But still the natives hung back. On their faces was a dogged look that chilled Johnston's heart. Big Kris, who had lived many lives in one, who had traveled far and turned his hand to many things, recalled a storm

which he had once seen sweep an Australian plain. On that plain were sheep, and when the herders tried to drive them to safety, they had lowered their heads and braced their legs, just as these sheeplike men were doing now.

They made no response to Ellis's threat, but not because they took it lightly. His face, almost always humorous and kind, looked like flint in the gray light.

But his rage was human and understandable, and a blow from his fist or his boot would be a brief woe at best. On the other hand, the woe that lived in that murky sea was eternal. Its threat was not in words—nothing that the darkened Aleut mind could understand—but a horror and a mystery and a shadow.

One of their leaders shook his head. "We no go," he muttered.

Ellis looked in despair to his two comrades. "Can't the three of us make it alone?"

But Johnston held to his iron control. "We couldn't even get started," he answered. His voice was not loud, but it cut through the wind's clamor. Then, almost pleading: "Come on, Michael—be a man. You, Ivan—start and the rest will follow. Paul—Malachi—Haman—one of you fellows, lead the way. We're going with you, you damn cowards. The girl'll drown if you don't hurry."

Again their leader shook his head. "We no go," he repeated.

He gave no reasons why. He left no opening for

argument. When Big Kris cursed them, bitter, black curses that had not soiled his lips in years, they looked at him dully, but they did not answer. And then Ellis tried a last tack.

He pointed a long arm toward the reef where a bit of white looked like foam on the dark waves. "Look!" he cried. "Do you know who's out there? It's Hilda—your friend since childhood—and she's only a little way. If you start now, you might save her yet." Then, with a voice that boomed in the storm, "Look at her, men—fighting alone in that sea! Can't you see her?"

Yes, they saw her plain enough. The trouble was that they saw other things too. In the eyes of the white men the scene was only of dusk and wave and storm. In the Aleuts' eyes it was the ocean gods in battle. The devil horsemen of the deep were riding to war.

These men were not white. They were the lesser people. They were not conquering Vikings from the North Sea, but the abject, dark-eyed folk. They not only feared death—the fear that the white men know—but all that lay beyond, all the horrors and unnamable things that their ghost-ridden minds could imagine.

"We no go," their leader said. But his words ended in a gasp. As he peered landward his sullen eyes suddenly flamed up, ruby-red, a phenomenon that his white chiefs were never to forget. Then he pointed, as a man points at a ghost. In startling silhouette against

the green western sky, a man's figure came running toward them along the dunes.

Loring had been in the village conferring with his band of spies, when the green nimbus of the storm came through the window. His leap from his chair was so abrupt and violent that it stirred London Nick to diverting memories. As a Red agent in Russia, Nick had once been ordered to dispatch an aged nobleman of Moscow. Inasmuch as he had been somewhat pressed for time, he had calmly and accurately opened fire the instant he was announced at the doorway. His victim had been seated and, struck in the heart, he had jumped up in this same way. Dwelling pleasantly on this incident, the Russian's eyes grew dreamy. . . . Loring himself made an excellent target, framed against the glamorous window. . . . But he must not anticipate matters. His captain's scheduled hour of departure had not yet arrived.

Loring's mind was far from bullets, and equally far from any pirate enterprise. It dwelt only on Hilda's last words, when they had separated in mid-afternoon. She was going over to Sea-Lion Rock, she said. It might be that she had not yet returned. And if the boorga should meet her at sea. . . .

Loring turned and ran. He sped up the old road toward the killing grounds, across a graveled beach, and onto the moors. Ordinarily, this was no country over which to hasten. Huge rocks were hidden in the

long grass. Yet he sped with a long, fleet stride, leaping over the hidden man-traps as if he had located them all beforehand. And indeed it seemed to him he had traversed this trail a thousand times in dreams.

He heard the gale strike. The roaring of the seals was almost drowned out, and lingered only as a strange, wild voice on the blast. Instantly the waves on the west side of the reefs quickened and crashed. Fighting his way to the dunes, he soon looked down on the gang of natives on the shore.

They had started to launch a boat, it seemed, but now they were standing idle. And when he came close, and when the natives turned to stone at the sight of him, Loring was himself aware of a poignant emotion. There was a wind that was not of the west wind along his hair, and a leap that was not of the waves' leap at his heart. He knew that this was one of the great moments of his destiny.

He sprang into the hushed throng. "Is Hilda out there?" he shouted above the gale.

Johnston bellowed into his ear, "She's hanging onto a rock—"

"Then why in God's name don't you go after her—"

"Because these Siwash cowards won't go. But there's four white men now. Maybe we can chance it—"

"Four men can't work a boat in that sea." Loring turned on the staring crowd, and his words bit like the wind itself. "You're men, aren't you, not squaws—"

And then, for one second, his breath died on his

lips. He gazed dully at the frozen circle about him. A minor miracle was happening before his sight. Some great force, akin to lightning, was striking the brown men. A white flame seemed to leap from face to face, flushing the dark cheeks and blazing in the somber, deep-set eyes. In that second of trance, not a man stirred or breathed. And then Michael reached and clutched Loring's sleeve.

"My God!" Ellis muttered. But no one heard him in the gale, and perhaps he did not know that he had spoken.

Michael stepped heavily forward. "We go now—" he said. "We go—if *you* go."

His eyes never wavered from Loring's face. "Then quick—into the boat," Loring ordered. No more could he waste time on miracles. The incredible thing that had happened fled from his mind, to return only in some calmer hour. "Johnston, I'll take the bow, instead of you. Pick out five of your best men for the oars."

Johnston need not plead with the men now. They pushed forward, like soldiers rallied in battle. Swiftly he picked his crew. They took their seats, and the others pushed off the boat. A moment later it was fighting out through the surf.

The marvel still endured. The crew worked the oars as only men can work under tremendous emotional impetus. They rowed with perfect team-work. They flinched neither from the nearing rocks nor from the menacing waves. Their stroke was quick and strong,

not jerky and aimless as when Terror rides in the bow. Indeed, they had forgotten terror.

They seemed to regard Loring as a talisman of fortune, to whom no harm could come.

Loring had never commanded such a crew. They obeyed him with the simple faith of children. Was this a tribute to his mastery, his native gift of leadership? Loring knew better. As a captain he was well endowed, but this devotion today was based on superstition.

They could not fail to win. The seas were still moderate—the gale had not yet worked around the point—and the Aleuts' precision in rowing kept the boat off the reefs. When it was ten yards from the rock where Hilda clung, Loring threw a line.

It was not until afterward that he perceived a certain grim humor in the fact that a line had been ready to hand. Ordinarily, a beached boat would have no such convenience. As a matter of fact, it was one of Loring's stage properties. When he had landed on the island, he had told a story of man overboard and a rescue expedition. Naturally a life-line went with the boat. Thus it happened that the drowning of the fictitious Eskimo Glosamuk resulted in the saving of the living Hilda Larsen.

At present he had no place for such ironic thoughts. His mind was a blank except for the work in hand. The bow of the boat rose and fell, the wind hustled it, and the oars flashed, but all this activity seemed far

and beyond his life, and the only reality was the slim white figure of the girl clinging to her crag.

The girl caught the line, and an instant later was drawn up to the side of the boat. Loring's long arms whipped down, his hands clasping hers. And these hands were not yet lifeless and still. They gripped, and their flesh was warm under their cold skin. To feel their currents—to know that she still lived, not faintly and falteringly but strongly and vividly—was the greatest gladness his own life had ever known.

But the clasp was instantly broken. There was no time to nurse the girl's hands in his—no time even to wonder at the jubilation of his heart. He lifted the girl overside and let her sink down at his feet. Then he carried on in the battle with wind and wave.

The hardest work was yet to do. The boat must be forced back to land against the off-shore wind. But the men heaved like giants at the sweeps, and the oar-blades bit true. Foot by foot, rod by rod, the boat was worked in.

All the men on shore waded out to meet it. Now Johnston and Ellis had seized the bow, drawing it in toward the bravest of the natives. Soon a dozen strong hands were pulling it up on shore.

Loring himself bent and lifted the spent girl from between the thwarts. She seemed entirely conscious, and as her face came level to his, her lips curled in a dim smile.

"Thank you, Paul," she whispered.

He started violently. But at once he concluded that she must be close to delirium after all, from terror and exposure, and had simply confused his name with another of similar sound.

CHAPTER X

LORING did not put the girl down at once. He would not surrender his burden to some fresher companion. His arms gripped her tight, as if he feared the storm might still sweep her away. Tired though he was, he led the file of men through the twilight back toward the village.

"I'm not hurt," she told him. Her voice was faint and tired, though perfectly clear. "That's the truth—I'm not hurt at all. It wasn't much worse than a long, cold swim. You'd better let me walk."

But he would not hear of it. If she needed warmth, his arms and breast would give it to her. . . . And true, these were strangely comforting. As his body heat surged through her frame she was obliged to fight against sleep. And this was a fight in which she was vanquished—warm and safe, she slipped away before she knew it. Nature had begun to collect for debts incurred.

The file moved into the shelter of the hill. Only scattered raiding parties of the wind were left. The dusk lowered. The clouds thickened overhead, so that the diffused rays of the lingering Alaskan day were almost obscured. A man could hardly make out his

fellow in the trail in front. And now the cold air and the relief from the buffeting of the wind were freshening Loring swiftly. He no longer felt tired, and he carried his burden almost without effort. His mind, dulled a little before, began to move in tremendous orbits. He was aware of soaring dreams . . . pleasant, foolish fancies. . . .

Presently he obeyed an impulse. He lowered his cheek against that of the sleeping girl. Hers was wet, cool and soft as shantung silk. Growing bolder, he bent his head and touched his lips to hers.

He smiled a little at the thought that he was stealing. Well, why not—had he not stolen before? A man who had looted a Burman temple should not have qualms about stealing a kiss. Besides, his brief caress at her lips hardly came under such a category. It was only a foolish experiment, not a kiss. Kisses were reserved for lovers.

Loring had never been a lover. That is, he had never loved woman, although he had followed many other fancies. He had had rough sweethearts—battle, danger and adventure—and sometimes he had gone to milder, softer mistresses, such as music, the beauty of sunrise, the moon on a tropic lagoon. Until now he could not imagine a woman in his life. And now that he *did* imagine it—now that the idea gripped him by the hair—he was forced to dismiss it with a grim smile.

But he must go on with it . . . he must face the

facts, just to see how ridiculous they were! It was true that Hilda had taken him, far more than he had dared admit. She had not only caught his fancy, but commanded it, commandeered it. In the first place, she fulfilled all that he would ask of a sweetheart. She had beauty—at least a glamor in her face that wakened dreams of beauty in him—and a warmth and magnetism that set him day-dreaming every moment she was in reach of his arms. Her lithe, slight body was curved, not straight and angular, and he could feel a softness against his breast. . . .

She was strong, sturdy, adventurous. She came of a stock that has, by its various offshoots, conquered the world. She could walk at a man's side. She could fly with a man's dreams. She could fill his arms at night and in the daytime, cheer him up the trail. She was not only the stuff of sweethearts but of wives.

Wives! His thought flinched again, yet he made himself go on. Yes, she possessed character fitting her for a mother of her race. And character mattered! Loring had not faced the world alone for twelve years only to remain a fool. He might lack character himself, but he could recognize it in others, and always he bowed down to it.

He must confess! He had dreamed valiantly, even if foolishly, of this girl who now hovered in his arms. He had imagined a home, with her the light and spirit of it . . . of seeing her hands flash in household tasks . . . of watching the lamplight in her hair . . . of

mutual laughter, of giving and taking, of surrender and conquest . . . of beauty and warmth and whiteness in hushed wakenings. . . . But now his dreams mocked him. He could toy with them when they were dim and far-off, but now that they came clear and vivid, he could see their false faces.

Home? Why, he had no home! He was a rover on the seven seas, and must always be. Unlike the seals, he had no place to come back to, when his wanderings were done. He was a bird of passage—a ship without an anchor. This fact alone must ever keep him from the common blessings possessed by other men. He was the Flying Dutchman who could never round his Cape of Good Hope.

This was only the beginning. There were a dozen other obstacles, equally impassable. He had come to the island on an evil errand. In a few weeks he would go away, the despoiler of Hilda's home. No love would follow him, but only hate. The thought of a tender passion in connection with his piratical enterprise was an absurdity beyond credence.

He had nothing to offer her that she needed or wanted. Although he had held himself proudly so far, maintaining a half-way decent level of conduct and cherishing the remnants of his conscience, he could not promise for his future. He had nothing to go on except his own scruples—no traditions to keep him at the mark, no background to live up to—and he had observed long ago that the scruples of men fly up and

down with circumstance. Heredity? In his case the word was worth a grin, nothing more. His mother was a harbor woman. His father a brutal pelagic sealer, whose only redeeming quality was his love for his son. True, he did not ordinarily permit these blots on his escutcheon to worry him. He stood or fell by what he was himself. Yet he was not a blind fool, and he knew that men bear seed after their own kind. The salmon goes back to his river—the seals go back to St. Paul. And in the end Loring would all too likely go back to the harbor-muck from which he had sprung.

Even if he could win her, he could not take her. It was just one of those things that simply cannot be done. For a man like him, who had lived the life that he had lived, who would go the way that he must go, to woo and win a girl like Hilda Larsen would be one of the major crimes. As such, it was out of Loring's class. At heart he was only a minor criminal at best, even though his enterprises attained the magnitude of war.

It would not be the sporting thing—and after all, Loring was a sportsman. So when he bent and kissed Hilda again he thought of the caress as one of farewell.

He carried the girl to Doctor Eberhard's office. The doctor, a big cultured German of broken speech, gave her his immediate professional attention. In something like two minutes he had diagnosed her case—

as a very brief and passing shock from fear and exposure.

Hilda had told Loring the precise truth. She was not hurt at all. She wakened when Loring laid her on the doctor's table, and she took a lively interest in all the subsequent proceedings. No, she felt no pain. She was not cold, and on the contrary, her skin had begun to glow. Why, she had clung to the reef less than a half-hour! Often, in the summer season, she had surf-bathed for a longer period. Certainly she would not spend the night in the hospital. Instead she would go home and to bed, because she had some important business to attend to in the morning.

But the doctor insisted that she spend the night under his care. She might have taken more harm than she knew. Two of the islanders had died only a few years before, as a result of prolonged exposure in icy Bering Sea. So she submitted to his orders, and Loring stole out without a word from her.

It was true that she had important business in the morning. She went first to the Fisheries kitchen where Wing presided, and the two had a long talk over the bread pans. Then the girl went to the library to consult the Log of the island. She hunted a long time through leather-bound, fly-specked old files. . . .

Noon came, and then afternoon. The wind began to die down, and the seal roar rose to its old, thrilling volume. Then she summoned Loring and led him, wondering, into Wing's kitchen.

"Wing and I have a little matter to talk over with you," she told him. "And I hope you won't think we have interfered too much in your affairs."

Her voice had an odd ring. He glanced up, his eyes glittering. For an instant he feared that the girl had stumbled on his plot. Certainly she was struggling with intense excitement. Yet her eyes were not indrawn and hard, but round, shining. Her lips were sober, but not tight—indeed, sometimes an expression that was like tenderness—a mother's tenderness, rather than a sweetheart's—flashed over them. Her cheeks were markedly pale except for a red spot high in each —a glowing, friendly sign that quieted the last of his fears.

His heart began to jump. He knew the beginnings of exultation. Yet when he looked farther about him, his old, cold, common earth seized on his feet again. This kitchen of Wing's was hardly a room of romance. There were pots and pans, eggs and big red steaks, and Wing himself, calm as his China hills, peeling potatoes.

The old Cantonese looking up with a wide smile as Loring entered. His quiet eyes moved over the white man's frame. "'Lo," he said. "Glad see you again." Then he went on with his potato peeling.

Hilda seemed oddly embarrassed. "The first thing on the program is to thank you for what you did last night," she began at last. "If you hadn't come along when you did, I'm afraid Mother Larsen's little girl would be far away by now." Then, quickly serious:

"I don't mean to be flippant about it—certainly it wasn't funny at all last night. You saved something for me that I'm just beginning to realize the possibilities of—my life."

Loring smiled frankly. "I'm certainly glad I happened along in time. This island would be a dreary place without Hilda Larsen."

Wing looked up, nodding. "Dleely place, I shou' say!" he agreed heartily.

"But I can't take all this credit," Loring broke in emphatically. "I'd like to—it's always pleasant to be considered a hero—but you remember I was only one of the lucky seven. Besides, you thanked me last night."

"Did I? Well, I didn't want to skip anybody. I'll get around to thanking all the men, in time. And why they should want to risk their lives for a scatterbrained girl who had no business being out in the storm, I can't imagine. But they did, and it's not for me to complain. There is something about men I'll never understand. . . . Now we'll take up the main business of this meeting."

Wing laid down his potato knife. "Fo' we talkee, maybe Mist' Loling likee sompin eat," he suggested. "Clup coffee? Pliece pie?"

"Thanks, I believe I'll just have a cookie." Loring walked over to a big cookie jar on the shelf, removed the plate that covered it, and helped himself. Wing smiled a little, secretly, and his eyes leaped swiftly to

Hilda's. And again that singular tenderness—that indescribable mother look—touched the girl's lips.

"Would you mind telling me how you happened to know that Wing keeps his cookies in that jar?" she asked quietly.

He paused in the middle of the floor and stared. "Why—why—I don't know! I've either suddenly become a mind-reader, or else I saw Wing go to the jar when I was talking to him the other day."

Wing shook his head. "Not go to jal t'othe' day. Guess you lead mind."

"You might be interested to know that Wing has kept cookies in that identical jar ever since he came to the island, more than thirty years ago," Hilda told Loring. "It seems quite a mystery, doesn't it? However, it's simple when you have the key. It's *very* simple—and a bit touching, too."

At once she cheered up and continued with the business of the afternoon. "Now, Mr. Loring, we're going to question you a little," she said. "I do hope you won't mind. You'll see what it's all about later. Some of the questions may seem even a little bit—well, personal. But this is a personal matter. First of all, what is your real name?"

"My real name—unless you've got something on me that I don't understand—is Pal Loring."

"Pal?"

"Yes. It seems a queer name for a man, doesn't it? It sounds like it ought to be the name of a dog. Just

the same, that's what my father called me, and what I was taught to write as my name."

"Your father was David Loring, a sealer who occasionally put in to St. Paul?"

"He was a sealer, but I don't think he ever put in here. He always seemed to avoid the island like the plague, although he killed seal outside the three-mile limit. He was afraid of the revenue cutters."

"I suppose so. . . . It might be that he had other fears, too. . . . Do you remember your mother?"

"No. She died—or else went away—when I was a baby."

Hilda's voice lowered. "What was your mother's name—her first name and her maiden name?"

The faint, amused smile that had lingered on Loring's lips until now slowly faded away. His eyes were coldly bright. "I'll answer that question because *you* ask it. I do not know either my mother's first name or her maiden name."

"Your father never told you?"

"No. . . . That is, he never told me true, as far as I know. My mother's name seemed to change from time to time."

"And you never saw a picture of her, either?"

"No. My father kept no picture of her."

"I have just one more question. Did your father ever hint to you of some secret about your birth—of any failure in duty to you?"

"Yes, he did. On the night he died he started to

tell me something. But he went out too quick. That was a good many years ago."

"And yet Fate meant that you should learn the truth in time." The girl spoke gently. "Now I'm going to tell you a little story, Mr. Loring. It concerns a tragedy of this island. Since your arrival you've heard mention of Cap'n Webber, haven't you?"

"Quite a little talk about him, in fact."

"He was the great figure in the early days of the American occupation. He was the government administrator when the commercial companies were here, and he had a way with the natives that no man has had since. Partly it was a gift; partly it was the result of a lifetime's study of how to handle them. They would follow him anywhere. They would give their lives for him. They centered on him the peculiar adoration that the brown people sometimes give the whites. They looked at him almost as a supernatural being—the Great Chief.

"He married rather late in life, and for a long time the couple had no children. A boy was born, however, about 1896. He was a great favorite on the island with natives and whites alike, and Wing used to be fond of him too."

Wing smiled vividly. "He come in kitchee, beggee cookie," he explained. "By'm by, he *stealee* cookie." The old Cantonese giggled.

"He also used to play around the seals," Hilda went on. "Especially he liked to tease some little kotiki

back from the rookeries. One day a pup bit him, Wing tells me, on his ankle. The sharp little teeth probably left scars."

Loring was now stark pale. "There are some scars —little ones—on my ankle," he said.

"All right. We'll go on. When the boy was four, a tragic thing occurred. His mother and father started for Otter Island in a bidarka, and both were drowned in a gale. It was a terrible blow to the natives. They could hardly believe that their great chief was gone. Since that time they have always maintained that he haunted Reef Point—and sometime, they thought, he would come back in the flesh.

"But I'm getting ahead of my story. The question was—what to do with the four-year-old orphan boy. The only possible thing, it seemed, was to send him to a cousin of his mother's who lived in Massachusetts. She was the nearest kin of the Webbers. So it was decided to bundle him on the first ship that came into port.

"The first ship happened to be a pelagic sealer that had broken her winch and needed some simple repairs. Since her captain had completed his season's catch, and was bound for Boston, naturally he offered to deliver the boy—and the letters that went with him—to the woman in Massachusetts.

"Now we'll have to begin to guess. Just the same, the guessing won't be hard. I think that the captain of the ship got attached to his little charge. It would

be pretty easy to do, you know, on a long cruise. And as the journey neared its close, he began to dread to part with him. And shortly he began to ask himself why it was necessary—why he should part with him at all.

"The woman in Massachusetts had only a small claim on him, at best. She was only a cousin—she probably did not even know of the child's existence. Perhaps the captain got to wondering whether he would be welcome—whether he would be treated kindly. In any event, he soon made up his mind what to do. He would not give the boy up at all. He would keep him for his own.

"It was a decision of far-reaching consequences. As the years went by, the affair became more and more complicated. I suppose he intended to tell the boy the truth, in a few years, but as his love grew, the task became harder. In the end he did not tell him at all.

"On the whole he did well by him. The boy grew up, not thwarted, but a living image of his father. Only in one way did the old sealer fall down—he was not a skilful liar. He would forget, from time to time, his own lies. The boy's mother's name was never twice the same."

The girl paused, and Loring watched with wide, grave eyes as she opened an old leather-bound record that she had brought from the Fisheries library. It was the log of St. Paul for the year 1900. In it she showed Loring an entry:

October 16th. Little Paul Webber sent off today to his kinfolk in Massachusetts, in care of Captain David Loring, of the sealing schooner Yarmouth.

The girl closed the book. Loring looked through the window to the green hills. "That is all the story?" he asked at last.

"That's all the story." She smiled faintly. "You understand, now, why the natives thought that Captain Webber had returned in the flesh, and why they were willing to follow you last night into the storm."

He nodded dully. To her wide eyes he seemed a stricken man. "I understand many other things, too," he said. "I understand how I remembered the name 'kotiki,' and how I knew the trail so well between here and the reef. I understand why I loved the green of the hills and the roaring of the seals. I understand why the seals seemed my own people—they *were* my father's people. And I understand why I came here."

Her clear brows drew in a question. "But I thought your landing here was just an accident—"

"It was more than an accident. It was fate. St. Paul has always called me. Its very name stirred me, and as soon as I saw the island I knew instinctively that it was home. I had to come back, Miss Larsen. The seals come, don't they? The salmon go back to their own river. The green comes back to the Pribilof hills in spring. I hunted a long time, and went off on many

false trails, but I found the home-trail at last. I had to come—it was just part of a big scheme."

He was deeply moved. Not only his words but his voice had an eloquence utterly foreign to him.

"Then you aren't a ship without an anchor, are you? Not just a bird of passage," said Hilda.

"I carried my anchor all the time, but I didn't know it." He spoke calmly now. "Miss Larsen, do you remember telling me of the greatest wonder of the seals? How they come back, and always must come back, to this one little island? The mystery has far more meaning for me now. It is still part of the great Unknown—like life and death and all the unsolvable things—but at least I can realize its truth. I used to think that the seals were just sea creatures, homeless as I seemed to be myself. I thought they were sort of brothers of mine—children of the open sea. Then I found out that they are like mariners, going back and forth from a home port—going out to sea on their long voyages, but always coming back to the shores they love. And then, still thinking that I was a homeless wanderer, I couldn't understand why they still seemed to be brothers of mine—my own people—and I to be governed somehow by the same laws that governed them, called by the same love that called them. But now the whole thing is plain. The seals *are* akin to me—bound up in my life. True, they are not sea waifs, but I'm not either. Instead, they are children of this rocky, foggy little island, and I am too."

"You've got your father's blood in you," she told him. "He was a sailor too, originally, but he also loved a home port. Because St. Paul was his home, he would fight for its seal as a herder fights for his sheep. And it's no wonder that the name of the island always interested you. It's your own name."

"Paul?"

"Yes. The Webbers named their little boy after the island where he was born."

There was a long pause before Loring responded. He stood gazing quietly out the window. He saw the green hills, the wandering fogs, the dunes and the seal beaches of his native land. And now he noticed a detail of the view that had escaped his eyes before. It was a gay-hued flag, the flag of a nation, that fluttered over the radio station.

He turned. He seemed no longer stricken and dull. To his eyes returned a familiar glitter—his silent laughter at the jest of life.

"The island where I was born," he muttered. "And I am an *American citizen.*"

CHAPTER XI

THE sporting thing was to be gay. To pretend that a man's losing of one name and finding of another was only an occasion for mirth. If Hilda did not laugh, she must weep. If Loring did not grin—sardonically grin at the fluttering banner on the station flag-pole and its significance in his life—he must grow tediously solemn. If Wing did not giggle and celebrate, he must fall to thinking of his own long-deferred homecoming, his childhood in far Canton and his exile in a lonely land. So the three made merry.

"We're turn about, now," Loring told the girl. "I rescued you from the sea, and brought you back to land, and you did the same for me."

"It was Wing as much as me," she replied. "He recognized you as a Webber the instant he laid eyes on you. Of course the older natives did the same—only they thought that you were Cap'n Webber in the flesh. 'Paul Loring Webber.' That's quite a name to give to a comparative stranger, isn't it?"

But soon the gaiety died away. The reckoning could be no longer postponed. "I've just got to leave you now," Loring told his friends at last. "I'm not exactly

shock-proof, and I find that all this news is beginning to stagger me. I'm going to the dormitory to think things over."

So he departed straightway. The dormitory proved a satisfactory place in which to reflect. There was no sound but the faint clamor of the seals, borne through the window, and this seemed to stimulate thought rather than to distract it. The years began to turn back like a rewound picture film.

His first discovery was that he had found his mother. The sordid figure he had thought of before had suffered a sea-change "into something rich and strange."

Just how much this fact meant to him—how great a consolation it was—he could not yet realize, or perhaps his fear of sentimentality would not let him admit the truth. She was not a harbor woman. She had not cast off her baby like a drowned cat. She had been a mother such as other boys have—tender, generous with kisses, self-sacrificing. Yet his thought stumbled when he tried to remember her. He was able to call up only the faintest images, and whether these were imaginary he could not tell. So far, there was nothing to recall her, nothing to remind him of her. He must hunt for her photograph, and this would no doubt stir his memory vividly, as did the roaring of the seals and the green of the hills.

He had always—as long as he could remember—possessed a father. The old sea-captain had been a father to him in a magnificent degree. Today's reve-

lation had not banished David Loring—no force under heaven could do that. It had only gained him another parent, one so splendid as to seem almost legendary. Loring need not be ashamed of his heredity now. Captain Webber was a man after Loring's own ideals. To find him thus—the rugged and conquering master of these arctic ramparts was far more gratifying that if he had been some rich baron in an English hall. The latter discovery would have appealed only to Loring's sense of the sardonic. To be proved the son of Cap'n Webber, however, stirred the romance in Loring's make-up as it had rarely been stirred before.

He had not been abducted through hate, like many sons who have lost their parents, nor had he been held for ransom. Rather the theft was his own—a baby's theft of a rough man's hungry heart. And this was genuine, and true, and in accord with life as Loring saw and loved it.

But now he must have done with the past and face the present. How was today's revelation to affect his buccaneering venture on the island?

He must look at this thing carefully. He must not be guided by puerile impulse. In the first place, he must admit that he had already lost his last vestige of enthusiasm for the enterprise. He had begun to lose it when London Nick became one of his crew. The very presence of the Russian had changed what had promised to be a highly romantic and thrilling adven-

ture into a cold, ruthless, rather sordid, possibly deadly, criminal raid. In the meantime other things had occurred to make him stop and think. He had learned that his grudge against the United States government was unfounded. For more reasons than one, the Yankees had been fully justified in restraining his foster-father from pelagic sealing. The practice had been not only wasteful, but atrociously cruel. The seals were Uncle Sam's property, provided the benevolent old gentleman was man enough to protect them. They were born on his island and, figuratively speaking, they sailed on their long voyages under his flag. They were not sea people, but mariners, who went back and forth to sea. He could no longer claim that the raid would be fair reprisal against a robber baron. Instead, it would constitute grand larceny of a decent government's property. And Loring did not like larceny. If he had no conscientious scruples against it, at least the committing of it was painful to his pride.

Perhaps his sentiments had become involved, too. The very sight of the thronging beaches had thrilled him to the core. Indeed, they comprised one of the great natural wonders of the world—perhaps the greatest wonder of animal life. He did not like to think of them being laid waste. The slaughter of two hundred thousand seals was no longer a pleasant prospect, but a horrible one. The whole island slippery with blood—the glorious chant of the herd giving way to the despairing outcry of the terrified survivors—the

decimation of the mother seals and their thousands of pups left to starve—such visions as these had begun to haunt his dreams.

The simple fact was that his conscience had begun to protest. It whispered up through all his prejudices; it insisted on talking to him when he was alone. It did not care how many laws he broke. It did not even object to loot, provided loot was taken in a sporting way. But it did object to vandalism—to manifold brutalities—to the desecration of God's earth!

He was also moved by purely personal considerations—mostly vague impulses that he could not put in words. To slaughter the seals would be somehow like fratricide. Last of all, but most important of all, was the influence of Hilda Larsen. To betray and lay waste the island of her home would seem the most despicable deed that had touched his life.

Many times, in the past three days, he had thought of recanting. It was his right to do so—a written right to which the men had agreed. They had signed the article that permitted their chief to call off the raid—"at any point in its progress," and for any reason that he thought "adequate." He alone stood to lose. His money was in the enterprise—with the stores and fuel that he had bought the men could make good profits at whaling. Even the spies on the island would not suffer—according to the articles, they were to share in the whaling catch the same as the men on the ship. Besides, he was the commander—it was his project

all the way through. Then why had he remained silent so long?

The answer could be told in one word—an ugly word which has launched as many ships, and started as many fights, as the face of Helen of Troy. Cowardice.

Loring had been afraid to back out. He had dreaded to face the rage of his baffled crew. And did this fear still command him? Would he still go on with the venture, in spite of all that man holds sacred? In spite of his far-known bravery in battle, his gallant adventures and his command over men, was he a moral coward?

The seal were his own people. His foster-father had preyed upon them, but his real father had stood ready to protect them with his life. All of his family traditions and background made him the defender of the herd, rather than its despoiler. This island was his home. This fog-bound, storm-cursed dot of green lost in the gray sea was his birthplace, his heart's desire, his Harbor of Return. Had he come back to his nest only to befoul it? Had he followed the Voice that had called him over the five oceans—the Voice which he had found at last, rising like a chant from the crowded beaches—only to silence it? Had he found a country only to betray it?

His country. The flag that fluttered over the island was his flag. Now would he lead an armed force to ravage that country, to overthrow that flag?

He'd be damned if he would! He never had a flag

of his own before, but now that it had come to him, by God he'd fight for it! He wasn't a help-himself soldier any more. He was a citizen of the United States of America. From now on he would not bear arms with every rabble that carried a banner. He would not quaff of every cup of strife that a warring world could offer. Instead, he would drink of his own well! He would fight beside his own people, for his own cause!

He might be a fool. Down in his heart he suspected that he was one. Yet this was glorious folly. And as he ran to his desk to compose a telegram to Captain Storkersen, his lips had begun to curve with the same smile that had so tormented Red Dunkirk when the two had met in battle in Ling Fu's dive.

For even though he was Cap'n Webber's son, this man was still Pal Loring. He still looked on life through Pal Loring's sunlit eyes.

CHAPTER XII

BEFORE evening Loring turned over the following night-letter to the wireless operator at the station:

CAPTAIN STORKERSEN,
Auxiliary schooner Jutland:

Give you three days to telegraph. Then we start for Nelson Island. Whaling deal off immediately upon our arrival. Tell your clerk that men's contracts are in files I M N O also A B C D E F. Clearance papers are with U S Government Dept. K L

LORING.

The operator promised to send it as soon as he had dispatched a batch of fast telegrams, which were always given preference over long, cheap-word messages such as Loring's. Loring decided not to wait, so it happened that he was absent from the wireless room when the keys clicked out to Captain Storkersen.

Yet the operator had another visitor. Haycox, who seemed to be fascinated by the wireless equipment and who spent several hours of every day at the station, wandered in and perched on the rail. . . . He seemed to be listening to distant crackles in the air. . . . And presently he got up and left the room.

Loring did not know of the ensuing conversation between Haycox and London Nick. Otherwise his communion with the sea and the twilight might not have progressed so pleasantly. His exultation might have met a sudden downfall. It was a brief talk, but one of far-reaching consequences.

Haycox found Nick in his room in the dormitory—reclining luxuriously on his cot and swinging his watch-chain in place of his monocle.

"Gimme a piece of paper," Haycox began hastily. "I've got to write som'pin down before I forget it."

So when Nick provided the paper, Haycox wrote hastily:

> Give you three days to telegraph. Then we start for Nelson Island. Whaling deal off immediately upon our arrival. Tell your clerk that men's contracts are in files I. M. N. O. Also A. B. C. D. E. F. Clearance papers are with U. S Government, Dept. K. L.

"Excep' for my training as a telegrapher I'd of never remembered it that long," Haycox said with a sigh of relief. "What do you think of it?"

The Russian examined the message critically. "It looks like a hodgepodge—noffing at all," was the reply. "Comrade, why do you breeng it to me?"

"Because I think it's something damned important. I think that when you translate it, you won't be laying on that bed so easy and comfortable. It's one of Lor-

ing's messages to Storkersen. I picked it up from the keys as the operator sent it. You know what you told me yesterday?"

"Yes. I ventured the opinion that Loring was beginning to crayfeesh a little. Ees that what you think it ees?"

"I do. I think he's going yellow."

"Ah!" Nick peered at him through an imaginary monocle. "My son, I feel it incumben' upon me to correc' that impression. While our friend Loring may be planning to go back on us, it ees an inaccuracy to speak of 'going yellow.' I hold no brief for the fellow. I should like to break his bally neck. But he eesn't yellow, and he nefer has been yellow, and, my son, he nefer will be yellow. Jus' bet your jolly life on that."

"Yellow or not, I think he's going to rip us. Now let's get at this message. You are not on to his and Storkersen's code, are you?"

"No. But thees does not look like a code message—"

"No, it doesn't. I'll give him credit for that. Just the same, it would sound a bit fishy to a bloke who was at all suspicious. The idea is, that in each message there is a variable keyword that indicates which of the other words are to be read, and in what order. There's no suspicious sounding word in this message, so I suppose the string of letters gives the key."

"I follow you wif interes', so far."

"Good. The key letters are I,M,N,O, A,B,C,D,E,-F, K, and L."

"How about U.S. Eesn't that part of it too?"

"By jingo, it might be. It's dragged in by the heels. We'll try it out, anyway. Now we change these letters into numbers, each according to its position in the alphabet. The letter I is the ninth letter, M, the thirteenth, N, the fourteenth, and so on."

"Good. Then we haf the numbers nine, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, one, two, three, four, five, six, and counting U.S. as part of the key, twenty-one, nineteen, eleven and twelve."

"All right, now we're ready to translate. The ninth word in the message is 'start.' The thirteenth is 'whaling.' The fourteenth is 'deal.'"

In a moment more they had the entire message. It read:

> Start whaling. Deal off. Give you three days to telegraph your arrival Nelson Island.

Haycox cursed as the meaning came clear; futile violence to be expected from him. He was never half the man that the Russian was. Yet London Nick did not altogether fail to show emotion. His restless hands dropped at his sides, and his slanting eyes shone like cut glass. These were signs that Haycox could read plainly, and which before now had made history in out-of-the-way corners of the earth.

"So?" Nick muttered. "So?"

"Yes, so! I s'pose you get it, don't you? Storker-

sen has got to start whaling at once. He's got to send a wireless from the Nelson Island station to show he's on his way. If Loring doesn't get that message in three days, he spills the whole thing to the authorities."

"But it ees his right by the articles, ees it not?"

Haycox caught his breath and whirled. His sullen eyes met his chief's. "Do y' mean you're goin' to stand by them articles?" he demanded, angrily.

London Nick did not answer, but turned away and lighted a cigarette. Then he lay back on his cot, smoking calmly. Now and then a shadow seemed to steal over his pale cheeks. Now and then the glitter under his brows became almost a red glow. He hummed a song of old Russia—one that he had learned long ago, as a lieutenant of Cossacks—a song of blood and sudden death and, most beautiful of all, of loot. At last he pinched out the cigarette and neatly disposed of it.

"Two hunner thousan' skins!" he murmured casually.

Haycox breathed deeply. "At least that many."

"Worf eight million gold rubles—I mean, eight hunner thousand pound sterling," Nick went on. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully, more to himself than to his companion.

"Every shilling of it and more."

"Not to mention a pearl of great price."

Haycox's eyes had been fixed on empty space, his pupils distended and glassy, but now he started violently. "What's that? I ain't heard anything about a pearl—"

"A figure of speech, my son, a figure of speech. Nefertheless, I repeat—a pearl of great price. She, comrade, will be mine. No one will cross me in this. If someone does cross me, he will soon be no one—that ees, non-existen'. A very delicate little turn of speech, ees it not?"

"Very," Haycox said. His eyes looked startled.

"I haf always been a fool about the ladees," Nick went on. "Bah Jove, Haycox, they have got me into more trouble than evereething else combined, but I cannot reform. You will bear wif me in thees, I know."

"You can have all the ladies you want. I'll be content with one of the brunettes. Now how about it, Nick? You've kept me strung along, long enough."

"How about it, you ask? How about eight hunner thousan' pounds sterling, not to mention the pearl! A pearl beyond any in the treasure house at Katif, which I once thought to rob? Am I a coward, Haycox, or only a fool?"

"Neither, by God!"

"A fool about the ladees, my son, but not about seals, and a coward about neither. So the deal ees off, ees it? We can now go whaling, and make two pound a day. We shall see about thees. We shall see, we shall see."

And thus it came about that less than an hour after Storkersen received a code message from Loring, Dutchie Schmidt, wireless operator of the Jutland, got a message from London Nick. It read:

Loring refuses to go whaling, exercising privilege in paragraph ten of articles. The rest of us want the expedition to continue just the same and are ready to go. Come for us three days earlier than you intended. Everything favorable for a big catch. If the big Swede stands in with Loring, argue with him. O'Neil knows my favorite argument. NICK.

Schmidt took the message, like a flying bird in his hands, and then sat motionless at his key. His blue, Saxon eyes were fixed on space. And so it came about that for the space of five minutes, the entire fate of Nick's enterprise—his millions in fur and his pearl of great price—rested on the shoulders of a humble wireless man. It was a risk that the close-figuring Russian had not liked to run, but which had been unavoidable.

Schmidt was not burdened with too great honesty; otherwise he would not be a member of a smuggler's crew. Yet his loyalty to Storkerson had become a habit, and Nick feared it. Now Schmidt's impulse was to tear the message. . . . To see the whole great scheme fall away in little yellow scraps of paper. . . . But his hand held. His heart leaped, and his lids began to narrow. His thick palms began to itch.

Why, this was like tearing up a fortune. . . . Fifty thousand dollars in seal fur, for his portion alone. . . . Success at last with the fräulein in a resort at Melbourne, and farewell to his rattling key forever. . . . Besides, neither Storkersen nor Loring had done right

by him. The other operator, Haycox, had been granted two shares of the booty, while he was allowed but one. Storkersen was old and unappreciative, and deserved all that would be given to him. . . . If Schmidt tore the paper, and concealed its message from the crew, there would be no shares at all. . . .

Mutiny! The thought was like live steam in his brain. It moved him darkly, and recalled him, somehow, to the one crime of blood he had ever committed. He had knifed a woman, once, a woman that had loved him but who could not control her fancies. Afterward he had mourned, yet a strange, sweet drunkenness, an exquisite languor, had soothed him like opium. Now there would be crimes of blood again.

He did not tear the paper, but took it to Black O'Neil. The Terrible Irishman scowled at the first words, but his dogtooth showed in a grin at the last. He appreciated the reference to himself. It was true, just as was stated, that he knew Nick's arguments backward and forward. However, the thought of mutiny was not so novel nor so exciting to him as it had been to Schmidt. He had mutinied before. His life—fighting the British troops around Dublin—had been one long continued mutiny. Besides, he had once helped throw a captain and two mates into the Gulf of Guinea. Mutiny was an old story to him. Yet he would be glad to hear it told again.

Black O'Neil and Schmidt together carried the message to Templeton, the jewel smuggler. From thence

it moved softly, stealthily, through the forecastle. Men leaned from hammock to hammock. They spoke a word over a hand of cards. They passed a whisper in a cup of grog. If Schmidt craved bloodshed immediately, all he need do to satisfy his craving would be to try to suppress the tidings he had started. It could not have been done with a machine-gun.

Everything was ready, the message said. Everything was favorable for a big catch. And certainly London Nick was as strong a leader as anyone could wish. In some ways he was to be preferred to Loring, for his methods were more direct. And instead of waiting three days more they could strike tonight.

Meanwhile Cap'n Storkersen had withheld Loring's message. He needed time to think it out—for his slow, sure brain to work around it as a net works around fish. At first he was savagely angry. His broad cheeks flushed; the muscles knotted on his prodigious arms. What right had Loring to break up the trip? To take the men on a rainbow chase and then drop them in the mud.

Presently Storkersen remembered the articles. Loring had merely exercised a right that the entire crew had conceded to him. The big skipper's wrath began to give way to heavy disappointment. Thence came resignation—adjustment—even a faint feeling of relief.

The enterprise had been one of tremendous magnitude. It seemed perfectly practical, and when Loring's

voice crackled in the cabin, it partook of a glamor that swept the old skipper off his feet; but when he thought upon it in solitude, it appalled him. After all, whales were safer than seals. And since the ship was stowed with provision and fuel, all at Loring's expense, whaling could be decently profitable. So at last he got up, sighed, and went to break the news to his crew.

He was not particularly on guard. If trouble developed from the men, it would naturally come later. They would need time to whisper and plot. Besides, they had no leader to follow—no touch with the spies on shore. That the crew might have already heard and acted upon the news did not occur to him.

He called the entire corsair band onto the deck. They were noticeably silent and grim. His voice boomed over the ship as he read the translation of Loring's message.

"Dat's all der is to it," he commented at last. "He's doin' der very t'ing we gave him right to do. Now we can go whalin' and make der best of it."

There fell a heavy silence. The men avoided one another's eyes. Finally Black O'Neil stepped forward. "Cap'n, I'd like to ask a question," he said.

"Yas?" Storkersen's big brow furrowed ominously. "Vat is it?"

"Would you be willin' to try to get in touch with London Nick and make the raid anyway?"

"I would not. I signed my name on der paper. It was my own name, dat I've stood by for a long time,

der name dat a ship cap'n in Norway gave me. I fight for dat name yust the same as I fight for myself."

"Then damn your eyes—fight!" Black O'Neil's voice broke like a billow over the deck. At the same instant he hurled a belaying-pin that he had held concealed in his hand.

A revolver shot would have been safer. Hardly could he have missed the huge, barrel-like chest. The slug of a forty-five, weighing less than an ounce, could have instantly changed to shark-food that two hundred and odd pounds of living iron. But O'Neil was inhibited by boyhood habits. He had gone to school in the alleys of Dublin, where shillalahs and cobblestones had been the tools of trade. Revolvers had been hard to get, and besides, their loud crack had usually summoned trouble. The belaying-pin had seemed to fit his hand better than any curved butt.

And certainly the weapon turned out deadly enough. Although it struck only a glancing blow at the skipper's head, he fell like a broken mast to the deck.

Events swept on. Above the sound of the crash, someone cried out in a heathen tongue. This was Tom Sing, the half-caste Malay, who was given to strange, haphazard deeds of violence. Perhaps he lusted for power himself; brown men do, sometimes. Perhaps he nursed an ancient, evil grudge that no one had guessed. More likely still, he was merely thrown off his mental balance by the suddenness and terribleness

of O'Neil's attack. In any case he rushed forward, his knife flashing like a flying-fish through the air.

So far, all that had happened seemed a single continuous motion. There was no pause; one event merged into the next before the startled crew could open its eyes. And there was no rest yet. The spirit of sudden death that had lighted from a clear sky on the deck was not yet full-fed.

In the crew there was the Alaskan sourdough Pete. He was a brutal man, known to have killed a fellow goldseeker in the Kobuck stampede, but it happened that he possessed a certain sporting sense. Perhaps it had been bred in his bones by his brief American school-days. In any event, he did not approve of murdering men when they are down and helpless. He was suspicious of knife men anyway, and the only "niggers" that he could tolerate were coal-black ones like Tubal, from New Orleans. Yellowish creatures like the Malay filled him with dark disgust.

Pete had not been bred to a shillalah, nor was he accustomed to the feel of a belaying-pin in his hand. He slew with a revolver—a long-barreled, single-action piece, which he fanned with his thumb. Now the weapon jumped from his shoulder holster as a black snake jumps from its lair.

Like all good gun-fighters, he ordinarily shot on the rise. The distance was short, the target easy, and to all appearances the Malay would go shrieking up to

his heathen heavens before a man's heart could beat twice. Yet nothing of the kind happened. A sardonic Fate, who so far had watched impatiently from the wings, now leaped to the center of the stage. The drama was becoming too tense, it seemed, and needed a flash of comedy relief. It was time for just such a jest as Fate was master of.

Sydney Bill, the mate, had all but anticipated Pete's attack. As the Alaskan's hand dived toward his holster, the Australian leaped to interfere. It was not that he particularly cared about Tom Sing. The lives of yellow and brown men are cheap as dirt. But as the temporary commander of the vessel he held certain obligations, one of them being to maintain the crew at its full strength and to prevent losses from internecine strife. As the armed hand leaped forth, he clutched at it.

He was not quite in time to prevent the shot but he did succeed in throwing off the Alaskan's aim. The bullet went wide of the Malay, who had seen what was happening out of the corner of his eye and had dropped squealing to his knees. And for an instant Bill assumed that it had whistled harmlessly out to sea.

But the breast of the sea had not taken the leaden slug. Such would be a lame joke at best. Presently a man who had stood watching at one side opened his mouth as if about to speak.

As yet he had made no utterance or sudden motion, and it was strange that he should so fasten the atten-

tion of the whole crew. Sydney Bill peered at him, and so did Alaskan Pete, and Tom Sing, the Malay, at last turned his head and stared. . . . This bystander had a peculiar expression on his face. It seemed to be rather a foolish smile, and his blue Saxon eyes looked startled. In the end he did not utter what he had been about to say, and indeed he made no noise at all, unless one counted the soft sound of his body wilting on the deck.

This man was Dutchie Schmidt, the wireless operator. For him, it had been an exciting mutiny after all, and he had partaken of its crimes of blood to an even greater degree than he had anticipated. But perhaps he was sorry now that he had showed Nick's telegram. The chance bullet from Pete's revolver was cruel and sharp in his heart. True, he was free of his rattling key, just as he had hoped, but he would not win his fortune in seal fur, and the fräulein he loved in the dive at Melbourne would laugh on without him.

The crew gazed in silence. Perhaps they wondered what other fees must be paid before their mutiny had run its course. But these were strong men, and soon they got themselves in hand. Because Sydney Bill had been mate and was now first in command, they obeyed his orders to weigh Schmidt by the heels and lower him overside. A Finn that was clever with rope bound the wrists and ankles of the fallen captain, and two men carried him into his own cabin. There he was allowed to fight his way back to consciousness.

The ship was made ready to sail. Shortly the anchor was brought up; the gray seas began to race back along her decks. And now the character of the enterprise had subtly changed. When blood had been spilled —when Schmidt fell lifeless on the deck—there had also fallen a certain gallant spirit from the prow. No more did Romance stand beside the wheel. No more did Adventure, valiant and magnificent, hold sway upon the bridge.

The articles had been broken twice. Order and discipline were at an end. As the men looked toward St. Paul, their brows were dark, their lips were drawn; their hands stole to their bulging holsters, and their fingers toyed at hilts.

CHAPTER XIII

LORING wakened in the middle of a foggy night. No sound had roused him; rather he had been startled from sleep by the absence of sound. Where was the wind that had wailed interminably? Seemingly it had been appointed by the gods of wind particularly to haunt St. Paul—to roam and cry forever over the dunes and across the headlands, perhaps as a penance for some high treason against its master in the world's young days—but suddenly it was still. The fog hung lifeless, and the roar of seals, which no night can ever silence, came not in gusts, rising and falling, swelling and dying away, but in a clear, unchanging call.

He was uneasy. His eye moved slowly about the dark room. There was no intruder—no ancient enemy had crept in to stab him while he slept—yet the motionless curtain seemed to menace him, and the white fog at the window seemed to invite a sinister shadow. . . . Yet no shadow came. When sound wakened, it was bold and outspoken, not stealthy and hushed. It was the tramp of men's feet down the corridor.

Presently someone knocked at his door. He started violently, and his hand went to his pistol that always lay in reach. But what use was the weapon? If the

men outside were enemies, they were five or six to one. Besides, they were probably on a peaceful mission—some business of importance had come up, and they needed his advice.

His door was unlocked. He could not resist if he wanted to. "Come in," he called.

The first man to come through the door was London Nick. He paused just beyond the threshold and flicked on the electric light. And at the first glimpse of him, Loring knew that his plans had gone awry and he had been betrayed.

Not that any great change had come over the Russian's face. His smile was no less insolent, his eyes mocked and glittered as ever, and his Oriental features remained calm. It was his dress that hurled Loring's heart into his throat. Nick had ceased to play the part of a common seaman, and had resumed his old pose. He carried a cane, and the tape of his monocle was once more about his neck.

No visible weapon was in his hand, and none was needed. With him were four men, all armed to the teeth. These were Gordon, the apelike man of all work, Templeton, the jewel smuggler, Tubal, the big Negro, and a Finn named Eno. Of these four only Gordon had come with the spies. The others were fresh off the ship—which meant that the raid had begun.

Loring felt no immediate fear of Nick. The Russian's sense of the artistic—his craftsmanship, as it

were, in the killer's trade—would not let him slaughter a respected foe in bed. But Loring did fear Templeton—with a fear that ran up his scalp and over his skin like vermin. The trim Englishman's eyes had a glisten of frantic excitement. And now Loring remembered that the jewel-smuggler had never been the same since his Dulmera Diamond episode in Hindustan.

It was a case similar to shell-shock. Between Dulmera and Calcutta, Templeton had been shot at a full score of times. Once a sleeping native girl beside him had wakened and gasped and slept again because of a deep-plunged knife obviously meant for his own breast, and twice he had seen body-servants die obnoxiously from poison. As a result of these things his steel had seemed to lose its temper, and men said that he was flighty. Now he stroked the trigger of his pistol in an uneasy manner.

No—the Briton was not to be relied on. Neither was Gordon, whose low organization and simple mental processes made him subject to violent deeds. One or both of these men would no doubt fire at the least provocation. And to die, virtually a suicide in his own bed, would be a joke which even Loring could not appreciate. To perish tamely and futilely, not with his boots on, but in his night garments! Why, laughter would ring from Shanghai to Rangoon!

"It ees wise to keep the han' from the pistol," Nick said, as if he had read Loring's thoughts. "You see, I haf arrange' a little signal wif these men—I raise

my arm, and bang! they all le' go at once. The signal ees like thees—"

He started to raise his arm. If he had expected Loring to flinch, he was disappointed. Instead, the prisoner looked Nick in the eyes.

"Go ahead and give it," he challenged.

"Oh no, nefer, not on your jolly life. We are all too fon' of your companee to remove you wif so little ceremonee. In fact, we like it so well that we haf come to invite you to join us on a little midnight walk. Jus' the same, little one, do not presume upon our good nature. If you are theenking that we will not shoot for fear of alarming the island, you should jolly well change your mind. The plans you made for the attack are so perfec' that a shot or two will not disrup' them a particle. It might waken some of the Fisheries men, yes, and sen' them running out of their houses, but they are helpless as so many mices running out of a hole. Why, the island ees already in our han's!"

Loring got out of bed and began to pull on his clothes. "The wireless station has fallen?" he asked quietly.

"My boy, there was nothing to it. I did not take part, myself—my duties being to stan' outside the building and direc' the vareeous attacking parties—but I haf already receive' a bulletin. Haycox handled his part of the work like a veteran. But you will learn the details later—at present we mus' proceed wif our engagements."

Loring finished dressing and Eno, the Finn, bound his wrists. Resistance was vain: this was not merely a guess, based on a study of Nick's character, but the opinion of an expert. Loring had worked out all these plans himself. He had prescribed that the wrists of all prisoners be bound until such time as they could be safely confined, yet he had so distributed the attacking parties that the escape of one or more of the men could do no harm at all. He could not now help matters by breaking loose and warning the Fisheries officials. Indeed, he might only cause them to lose their lives. They were hopelessly outnumbered, and now that the wireless station had fallen, they could not send for help.

Little Kris lived in one of the larger administration houses. It is doubtful if his door had seen a key in seven years.

"Walk on tiptoe!" Nick directed—and the five men followed him through the halls. Stationing Eno outside the door, he led the others into Kris's bedroom, reached with a sure hand to a switch, and flooded the room with light.

Kris leaped from sleep. The fear that men know on being wakened too suddenly flashed across his face. "What's the matter?" he demanded.

"A little midnight call," Nick explained with a smile. "We fancied that you might like to join us."

And now the fear in the face of Little Kris changed in character. It was no longer personal and prim-

itive terror, learned in the primordial jungles when men slept abroad at the risk of their lives. Rather it was dread of the dawning truth. It was the realization that all he had builded was about to fall; that his life's work, which he treasured far more than life itself, was about to be proved vain. He saw now that Nick's men all had guns in their hands, and for some other purpose than merely to guard Loring, their wrist-bound prisoner.

Still he prayed for the best. "Who are those men with you?" he asked. "I don't mean Loring and Gordon but the other two."

"Bah Jove, you must pardon me." Nick screwed his monocle into his eye-socket. "I quite forgot to do the honors. One of these gentlemen—the lighter-complexioned of the two—ees Templeton, who once brought the Dulmera Diamond through a net of knife men a thousan' miles long—only to lose it to a London pickpocket. The other ees Tubal, of the ol' Southern aristocracy."

The Negro grinned broadly. He did not understand Nick's humor, but admired it just the same. Besides, the Russian's garb, his monocle and particularly his perfume appealed to him inordinately. It was an honor to serve him. At his least desire, Tubal would shoot the blue-eyed island chief without mercy.

"Why have you got Loring tied?" Little Kris asked.

"Oh, jus' to make certain he would come wif us. Loring, you understand, was the brains of the enter-

prise until he had an unexpected attack of conscience. Now will you arise and join us? We haf other calls to make."

Little Kris leaped out of bed. He seized Nick's arm, oblivious to the uneasy pistols around him. "My God, man! What do you mean to do?"

"What do we mean to do? We haf already done it, comrade! I mus' inform you, with apologies, that you are no longer in command of the island. The new commander ees at present before you, your humble servant. I also command the wireless station, until now the province of your benevolent uncle, Samuel by name. Resistance, I regret to say, would not only be useless, but expensive. These men of mine, though jollee good fellows in everee way, are inclined to be careless with ammunition. To save the lives of your people, my dear Little Kris, I would advise that you come wif us peaceably."

What other choice did he have? Little Kris began to draw on his clothes. And presently he too was walking through the wet fog, his hands bound, his heart like lead in his breast.

Nick was not so polite to Ellis. The game had begun to lose its zest. The old sealer was ordered out of his bed and bruskly told to dress. When he objected, Gordon slammed him against the wall. And now, for the first time, Loring cursed. A rage knocked at his heart which, had he let it in, might have betrayed him to his death.

But he kept his grip. He knew that if hope lived at all it was yet far off. Grimly he watched the capture of Big Kris, the bearded Norwegian; silently he saw Gordon manhandle an old native who had run up clamoring to find out why his white chiefs walked in ropes.

"We will not imprison the other three gentlemen tonight," Nick said. "They are sleeping peacefully at home, and our intrusion might deesturb their good ladees. Templeton, you will see that they are taken in charge tomorrow. I refer, of course, to Johnston, the agent, Page and Doctor Eberhard. Now we must show our guests their rooms for the night."

Loring knew perfectly well what rooms these would be, because he had made the arrangements himself. The more important prisoners among tonight's captives must cool their heels in the village jail. Here—where Aleuts drunk with kvass had often roared through the long black winter nights—he and the three Fisheries officers were confined.

They were not the first prisoners. Captain Andy of the launch and Chief Petty Officers Helms and Lane of the wireless station were already locked in the cells. For a long time the men spoke hardly at all. They listened to the silence and the seal roar, and their thoughts were as dark as this dark room itself. Finally Little Kris's mind began to clear. He was trained to crises; his instinct to command began to manifest again. His inner wakening seemed to arouse his companions. They began to talk in low tones.

"What happened, Helms?" Kris asked at last. "Did the wireless station fall without a fight?"

It turned out that there had been no chance to fight. The attack had been planned to the last detail, and was practically an inside job. As near as Helms could tell, Haycox and One Eye Smith had wandered into the wireless room about midnight. Haycox had already won the friendship of the boys—he had seemed so interested in wireless—and they knew Smith by sight. They may have said they wanted to send a telegram. Possibly they pretended to be merely passing the time of day. There was no rule by which visitors were excluded from the rooms, Helms explained. The station did commercial business, and the sailors were ordered to treat the public with courtesy.

The guards must have been felled in a surprise attack. Helms had not heard the details, but as the watch that night had been kept by tattooed gobs of the old school, certainly they had not yielded tamely. Then the pirates had temporarily disconnected the wireless keys, so that the long gray leagues of the sea could not be bridged again short of several hours' work. This, of course, was to prevent accidents during the first night of strife. Even if one of the sailors did escape from his guards and fight his way to the wireless room he could not tap out an S.O.S. into the air.

In the meantime a large party of the corsairs, containing at least fifteen men and in command of Brophy and a big black Irishman, had searched the sleeping

quarters, seizing one man after another. The sailors had wakened from their dreams to find that something stranger than a dream had come true. Helms himself, however, had been given a moment's respite.

He had been wakeful, he said, and had seen part of the gang advancing under the porch light. He had not identified the men—he knew only that they were armed invaders of United States territory and his well-learned naval regulations had supplied all the other information he required. Only a fool would have made a vain lone stand. Helms had kept his head, leaped through the window, and had run to the "armory" where the station's small store of rifles was kept.

The door of the room had been broken up, Helms said, but the guns stood in black rows as always. He had snatched up as many as his arms could hold and had sprinted into the barracks, where the unmarried men slept. Here he had found four gobs—just getting out of bed and jubilantly grateful for a chance to fight.

"Up to now they always thought those guns were just decorations," Helms explained in the middle of the recital. "Now they almost kissed 'em!"

But this was Helms's only pleasantry. The rest of the story was grim and cold. The sailors themselves had been grim and cold—and at the same time, perhaps, gloriously drunk with that still and mirthless drunkenness of battle. Otherwise sensible and clear-headed men stood ready to give all they possessed—their lives—for the oaths of governments they could

not begin to understand. Such was the magic of the black and glossy rifles in their hands.

The pieces were no longer "just decorations"—annoyances to clean and keep ready for useless inspections. Instead, each had slipped into its owner's arms like a lover. And indeed it must be almost a supernatural instrument whose butt can change a boy into a man, and whose muzzle can change a foe into a harmless heap of dirt. It might be that these five men would sell out in the end, but never cheaply. The pirates must pay a high price.

Each man had taken a gun, and each man a window. There ensued one moment of high enthusiasm, worth being born for and almost worth dying for. And then there had been a hideous anticlimax.

Helms had started to cock his piece, and his hand groped in vain for the round, good end of the Springfield bolt. He had looked down in sudden horror. The bolt of the rifle had been stolen, and it was the same with every weapon he had brought. As he snatched them from the rack he had failed to notice the theft.

What had remained? Nothing but abject surrender. Hands cannot win against steel. Curses cannot prevail against bullets. As commander of the station, Helms's last duty was to save the lives of his men. The United States Navy will take a sporty chance with anyone, Helms explained, but it is not a fool!

Captain Andy of the Eider sighed at the conclusion of the sailor's story, and told of his own ill fortune.

It was true that he, also, had been forced to yield without a fight. His deck had needed no washing-down when he surrendered it to the pirates, a fact that would trouble him forever. And he, Andy, had been a two-fisted man in his time. . . . He had been a pelagic sealer, he said, and he could mind the day when the little brown men of the Tosa Maru had tried to board him. . . . But tonight his hands had been tied by treachery. Lars Johanessen was his friend, he had thought—they had talked together of the ships of Bergen and the maids of Stavangar—and when the spy called in the dead of night, Andy had invited him into his cabin. But it was not a cup of smuggled drink that he held in his hand, nor yet a curved and blackened pipe. With rough hands and rougher speech Lars and his men had taken Andy prisoner, later to do the same to the mate, the engineer and the cook.

"You're not to blame," Kris told him kindly. "You did just right to surrender, and so did Helms. It wouldn't help our cause to have you fellows murdered without a fight."

"You didn't have a chance," Loring said. "The whole thing was planned to the last detail. The man who broke into the armory was Brophy, an expert cracksman. Nick probably spiked the guns himself."

Presently Lane, second in command to Helms, thrust his sharp jaw forward. "How do *you* know so much about this business, Loring?" he demanded ominously.

Little Kris himself explained. "He knows *all* about it." The administrator's tones were grim and low. "He was in command of the party of spies—at least I gathered as much from London Nick. And now, Nick tells me, he has refused to go ahead with the deal. So he's to be treated like the rest of us."

"How do you know he isn't a spy still? That the gang didn't put him in with us just to hear us talk over our plans?"

"I have thought of that. I think it entirely likely. When we have plans to talk over, I think we'd better leave him out of them."

"We might bash him for luck, while we're about it."

"I don't think we'd better. There's at least a slight chance that he's sincere. Hilda hinted to me last night that he had made some discovery here on the island of deep importance in his life, and this may account for his change of heart. We can save our violence for the men that we know are our enemies. However, we've trusted too much to strangers up to now, and we won't make the same mistake again."

"I don't expect you to believe me," Loring told them rather cheerfully. "I can hardly believe it myself. It just happens that as the son of Cap'n Webber—and an American citizen—I developed some queer nonsense. It's strange the hold that such things can take on a man. I found that I was physically incapable of leading an armed invasion of my own birthplace and firing

on my own country's flag. That's the whole truth, whether you want to believe it or not."

"The son of Cap'n Webber!" Ellis echoed incredulously.

"Yes. It sounds rather fishy, doesn't it? However, as an old-timer here you may remember hearing that the Webber boy, four years old, was sent off to his relatives in charge of Captain David Loring, a pelagic sealer. The boy was never delivered."

"It sure does sound fishy," Lane broke in contemptuously. "Ellis, how do you know this isn't just part of the game? The crooked genius behind this raid could easy be smart enough to think up a story like this."

"Maybe, but I'm inclined to believe him," the old sealer said. "If you'd seen what I saw—down on the reef, where Hilda almost lost her life—you might believe too. Certainly Loring has an uncanny influence with the natives."

"If you look into the Log of the island for the year 1900 you'll find some evidence to support my story," Loring told them. "Just the same, I admit that my case doesn't look any too good. I was not only the leader of the spies, but the commander-in-chief of the whole expedition. It was my idea—an idea that I thought justified by circumstances."

"And now—after getting the whole thing up—you ask us to trust you?" Little Kris asked gravely.

"No. I'm not asking you to do anything. I can take care of myself, thanks—you and the rest can do

what you think is best for your own sakes. If you want to treat me as an enemy, I'll stay out of the scrap altogether, an arrangement that will make the pirates very grateful. On the other hand, if you think I'm all right I'll fight on your side. I know all the plans of the expedition—made 'em myself, in fact—so I ought to be in a position to give some valuable aid."

"As our captain, I suppose?" Kris asked.

"Not quite that. However, I don't intend to serve in the ranks."

Kris looked him over, first with anger and then with an odd man-to-man understanding. "I'm hoping you'll prove all right," he said at last. "I'm frank to say we'll need every man we can get. However, we'll have to wait for more evidence."

And now their talk was for a moment interrupted by the sound of voices in the road. Again the jail door opened, and again a prisoner was thrust through. To Loring this proved a familiar face.

"Who are you?" Little Kris demanded.

"My name's Storkersen, former Cap'n of the Jutland, but not cap'n no more. Hello, Loring. So dey got you too, did dey?"

Loring grinned. "I've been hoist with my own petard, Cap'n. Good Lord, what's that wound on your head?" He indicated a fresh red gash beneath Storkersen's clotted locks.

Simply the skipper told his story—of Loring's telegram, of his own decision to stand by the articles, and

of Black O'Neil's murderous attack upon him. He did not understand why the other prisoners should listen with such breathless interest. At the end, Little Kris asked to see the wireless message that Loring had sent.

"Why so?" Storkersen demanded gruffly.

Loring smiled and explained. "You see, Cap'n, these men are suspicious of me. They think I'm still in cahoots with the crew. Of course if they think that, they'll have to think that you are, too, in spite of the gash in your head. Go ahead and show 'em the telegram."

Storkersen produced the message and explained the code. "But I'm doin' it because Loring asked me to," he grumbled. "If I was him, I'd let you all go plumb straight to hell. If you didn't want to believe me, I'd yust let you get out of dis mess der best way you can, and I wouldn't risk my life opposin' dat gang of cut-t'roats."

"But you see, I got 'em into the mess," Loring said. "I've got to do what I can to help them out of it, if they'll let me. Besides, sitting around and watching the fight from the side-lines would bore me stiff."

"By Yiminy, it would! Loring, you never could stay out of a fight. Listen here, you fallers. If you don't let Loring enlist wit' you, you're making the worst mistake of your lives. He's yust the man that can whip dem devils. Fight? He ain't never done

not'ing but fight. He yust got t'rough being a general in der Chinese army."

And suddenly, Little Kris was convinced. Whether it was by Loring's own story, or by the deciphered telegram, or by the lurid scar on Storkersen's head, or perhaps by all three he did not know. He knew only that he was in the midst of romance, and that a prodigal son of the island had returned. With this knowledge came renewed hope. Loring, a trained professional soldier, was just the type of man that the cause most needed. Not one of Kris's own lieutenants was an expert in the tactics of battle. True, Helms and Lane were sea-fighters. Give them a fourteen-inch gun on a heaving deck and they would see what could be done. But neither was trained to infantry maneuvers on the terrain of St. Paul.

And indeed, the baffled little garrison had gained a stanch recruit. Loring would give not only his skill as an officer, but the warrior zeal of his heart. Somehow, this would be different from his other wars. Before he had always fought under foreign flags, for the cause of other peoples. Now he would fight for his own cause, under his own flag.

"And I guess you'll come along too, won't you, Storkersen?" he asked. "You'll come in on a hand with the boys?"

Storkersen glared at him. His big throat growled. "You want me to risk my neck too, do you?" he de-

manded. "You bring me here, and promise to make me a million dollar, and den you not only t'row me down but inwite me to get meself shot full of gottam holes? Vell, I've lost der ship anyway, 'cept for der insurance. I might as vell go der whole hog."

"Might as well," Loring agreed cheerfully. "Besides, if we ever get out of this jail we can do some hole-shooting ourselves."

"All right! All right! All right!" Storkersen eyed him with displeasure. "You're yust a fool, Loring, and I'm yust a bigger one."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE makeshift prisons and in the houses of white women there was excitement and fear and confusion, but the island itself did not waken from its ancient sleep. The gray seas climbed up and down the cliffs, the ghost armies of the fog swept over the dunes, and the seals roared and clamored just as they had done since the world was young. What did these things care about another invasion? The reign of the pirates was only for a moon or two at best, but theirs was of eons. This was just the repetition of an old tale. Men had raped and gone away as long as the oldest land-crab could remember. The Russians had come first, bearded, savage adventurers in high-pooped ships, and then poachers from all nations, who stole in in the mist, robbed, and stole away—and finally had come the Americans. What difference did it make if the power should pass once more?

What did it matter if the Stars and Stripes were taken down from the mast over the wireless station, and the death's-head banner raised instead? The wind would rip it to ribbons just the same. Why should the seals be concerned as to the color of the skin, and the tongue of the oaths, of the island conquerors?

They must die, in greater or less numbers, just the same.

The Aleuts were like the inanimate features of their landscape. Outwardly they seemed indifferent to the changing fortunes of the island. Their deep-set eyes remained unkindled; they talked among themselves in their guttural monotone. And why not—they were only the brown people, and they too had changed masters many times before? It was not for them to discriminate between one white skin and another; their business was to drive and club and flay at their conqueror's will. Might is right at St. Paul. They were only Aleuts, and the ways and the wars of the white man were ever beyond their ken.

Yet they were somewhat bewildered. Events had followed one another so fast. Long ago they thought that the Russians had departed for good and all. Then Cap'n Webber had ruled them—firmly but not cruelly like the bearded Muscovites—only to vanish without trace in the murky sea. Now, twenty-five years later, when the great Little Kris was their white chief, Webber had returned. The old man had recognized him at a glance, and even if he were only Webber's son, as the young school-taught men maintained, the wonder was no less. But only a few days after his reappearance, he walked in ropes, and a Russian of the Russians stood at their head again.

They had not failed to identify London Nick. Beneath his English speech they heard the purring accents

of their old conquerors; through the round glass in his socket they saw the cold, bright eye of the spoiler. The wheel had gone round. The easy, full-fed days of the American occupation were at an end. They must leap to obey Nick's commands, because he would not speak twice, nor would he punish offenders with schoolboy penalties such as fines and jail sentences. It would be the whistling knout and the barking, obliterating pistol from now on. But of course there were compensations. . . . No doubt they would be allowed to leave their little white houses of frame and go back to the close, warm dugouts where the old men were born. Perhaps also they would be given vodka on feast days.

It was not long before the natives of St. Paul's sister island, St. George, were also made aware of a change in masters. On the first day of the pirates' occupation London Nick carried out a secondary expedition which had been outlined in Loring's plans.

Between St. Paul and St. George there was a wireless telephone connection. Every day young Page, Johnston's assistant, bridged the inter-island waters with his voice. If that voice was silenced, the St. George men would wonder, and perhaps complications would result. Thus it was that the pirates must control not one of the sister islands, but both.

The telephone had been temporarily dismantled on the night of attack. If by stealth it could be put in commission again, and a call put through to St. George,

there must be no one to answer. So when the white prisoners of St. Paul were all safely confined, and only a small force was needed to guard them, some twenty of the men, commanded by Lars Johanessen, boarded the Eider and set sail.

In the twilight they anchored in the St. George harbor. They put off two boats loaded with armed men, who landed at the dock. There they met the white agent of the island, who had come down to greet Captain Andy, and to marvel why the Eider was carrying so many passengers.

But where was Captain Andy? The man who walked to meet him was a scowling stranger whom the agent had never seen before. The others moved like pack-wolves and surrounded him—sneering, sinister. And when he asked questions, they answered with jeering oaths.

He turned to walk away—secretly to warn the other officials—but a huge Swede snatched him. Evil days had come upon his island! Deft hands bound him, and the corsair band marched into the village to take possession.

There were only four or five white men on the island—a helpless little garrison already prisoners of the sea—and these were to be taken to St. Paul where a proper guard could be placed over them. And there was to be other cargo, of other color. The men began to weave through the village.

A large crew of natives would be needed for expedi-

tious handling of the seals, Nick had said. These Johanessen was prepared to supply. Plainly he had missed his calling and his time—he should have captained a reeking slaver in the early days of the Gold Coast. He rounded up thirty of the most experienced sealers and drove them into his hold.

They were dumb as cattle. The conquering white man must be obeyed. And besides, this was not the first time the Aleut had been forcibly removed from his home, and it was the Russians who had transported him here over a hundred years before, from his native place on the Aleutian chain, to work with the seals. This ship now was moved by mysterious engines, instead of sails, and beards were few and small upon the deck, but otherwise the experience was much the same.

The ship ran back to St. Paul, and the St. George white captives were imprisoned with the others. Occupation progressed. Some few of the invaders, finding idle time on their hands, already walked with Aleut girls in the misty road. The young squaws had begun to accept the corsairs' presence as a matter of course.

Certain safeguards were looked to, just as Loring had planned. Now one might understand why the masts of the Jutland had been painted gaudily green. When the hull was camouflaged with green-painted canvas, the ship literally disappeared against the verdant hill of English Bay. A revenue cutter could pass within a mile and never know that a strange prow had visited the shore.

On the morning following the coup, London Nick filed another long telegram at the wireless station, but no slim-waisted sailor took the sheet now. The man sitting at the desk was Haycox, and at his hands was the key to unlock the silences of the ether. He had come into his kingdom. His eyes were quiet, and no more did he seem to listen for distant cracklings in the air. His fingers were even more at home at the clacking key than at the quivering windpipe of a foe. Beside him sat his understudy, a little Welshman named Sparrow. Sparrow was not an expert operator, but he could take the watch and waken Haycox to receive incoming messages.

The long "official" telegram that Nick sent was:

Commanding Officer
Bering Sea Patrol, Unalaska:

We have information that three Japanese vessels are planning a raid sometime this month to kill female seals at the fishing banks approximately one hundred miles from St. Paul. Suggest that you keep available coast-guard vessels in those waters during the next forty days. As you know, Japan has protested treaty and we think this will be a test case. No danger within the three-mile limit. We can watch these waters ourselves and send for you by wireless in case of trouble. However, should you decide for any reason to send a vessel into St. Paul or St. George within the next forty days please notify me three days in advance so I can write some reports to send out by you. The

Eider will not go to Unalaska for some weeks as we will need her here.

Naturally, the name signed to the message was not London Nick. It was the name of the administrator of the islands, Little Kris.

The Russian listened to the clattering key with delight. The revenue cutters were now forestalled. Three days' warning would give the raiders plenty of time to sail from the island and vanish in the fog. Moreover, so zealous were the coast-guard officers that they would keep watch at the fishing banks night and day. Sealing operations could now begin in earnest.

Nick went to Kris's house, which he had commandeered for his own use, and made certain alterations in his appearance. No more did he wear the garb of a common seaman. He had already resumed his monocle, his cane and his perfume, and now he donned his best clothes. He was from henceforward commander-in-chief of the expedition, and he must look the part.

Already the hold of the Jutland was filling with riches. In the salt-houses the raiders found five thousand pelts, which were promptly stowed aboard. These were the lustrous, rippling skins of young male seals—the holluschickies—which the native sealers had already taken as part of the government catch. No wonder the men's eyes lighted. Why, the raid was already a success! Even if a warning came tomorrow, and the Jutland was forced to sea, she would

not go with an empty hold. There could still be revelry in some far Siberian port—and better wages than they could possibly make at whaling. Each of the skins was worth four guineas.

And these were but a sample. The young males swarmed like bees on the hauling ground—ten thousand to a band. And there were a hundred thousand females, always prime and precious, which could be driven from the rookeries after the guarding bulls were slain. Living gold! Treasure Island, if such a place existed on the earth!

The native sealers would work in sixteen-hour shifts, with only eight hours' rest. It would be a killing pace, but the knout and pistol would help them maintain it for thirty days. And not only the patient brown men must herd and club the seals. There would be white prisoners among them—tame fellows who could be cowed with a blow—and of course the raiders themselves would stand shift, and the crews.

Would the corsairs not be needed as guards of the remaining prisoners? Ah, that was the joke of it! On this detail, Nick's plan was far superior to Loring's own. Kris and his friends were to be kept in an inviolate prison.

Certainly the raiders would take readily to the work of seal-slaughter. Their hands had been red before—the debauch of killing would inebriate like strong drink—and they might watch the precious pelts pile up like leaves.

Native women could help to drive seals to the killing grounds. The service of supply would also be in their hands—they must carry coal to the field kitchens and cook for the crews. The raiders themselves, however, need not live on native fare. Instead of seal meat and sour bread, they could have delicacies from the Fisheries kitchen. Why should Wing be taken from the post he had filled for thirty years? He was only a harmless old Chinaman—yellow as his own pancakes—and his skill would add to the pleasure of their visit.

He seemed to take the conquest as a matter of course. No fire flared up in his calm slanting eyes; no passion wrenched his thin, placid lips. He did, however, trot over to see Loring in the village jail. In his apron and cap he stood outside the jail window and talked plainly and mundanely through the bars.

The lone jailer saw no reason to interfere with him. . . . No use to antagonize old Wing, and perhaps be served inferior portions at the table. . . . He was merely trying to console his former masters.

He looked squarely into Loring's eyes. "When you and Little Klis say so—I bling you clup coffee, pliece pie," he said.

Loring searched the impassive slanting eyes. "What kind of pie?" he asked steadily.

"Oh, mince, plunkin, pleach. I cut you big pliece, wi' *knife.*"

Little Kris breathed deeply. "You bake any time, Wing?" he inquired.

"Any time aft' suppel, when I got time. You tell Hilda when you want pliece."

At once he shuffled away. Loring and Little Kris exchanged glances, but neither confessed that he read a hidden meaning in Wing's words. Loring was not yet aware that the administrator trusted him. Little Kris, on the other hand, knew that Lane and some of the Fisheries officials still suspected Loring, and that these men would resent any discussion of plans in his presence.

Hilda, it appeared, had the run of the island. By Nick's orders she was not to be molested by any of the pirate band. He himself showed her every consideration, plainly hoping to win her by fair means. Why not—he had won other women? His peculiar genius of resolution and ruthlessness was not without its appeal, a fact proved by a score of fond amours in as many different cities. True, most of his loves were "American girls," as they say in China, but the love-light glowed in their eyes just the same, and there was once a Russian lady, widow of a nobleman whom Nick himself removed, who had—but *zut!* That was far off! The widow was now dead, victim of a jealous revolutionist, and his harbor women were following new lights. Hilda alone filled his eyes now, and by his Lady of Kazan! she was worth all the rest put together.

She was icy, but she might thaw. She was disdainful, but as his star rose and his power became more

and more manifest on the island, she might turn admiring. Now she was only a dream to haunt him and keep him from sleep—a desire that overswept him in warm waves—but before long her possession might be a reality. Might be? It must be! He was always a fool about women, he had confessed, and never had his folly gripped him so strong. The slight blonde girl, hardly more than a child, was far more necessary to him than any full-breasted daughter of the ports. Certainly she would leave the island with him, but there was no need and no sense in hurrying matters too greatly.

It was for quite a different reason that he protected the other white women. This was his cunning rather than his folly. He simply did not desire to incite his prisoners into a holy war. He had seen a holy war before—a very minor conflict in which one Malay zealot had run amuck in a Manila dive—and the number of casualties resulting was an amazing and disconcerting thing. In all probability the married men of the Fisheries and wireless staff would keep their heads about the seals. They might fight for them, if a fighting chance was provided, but they would not vainly and desperately throw themselves against the enemy guns. But if their homes were attacked, they would resist like fiends. This island venture might end in absolute chaos. . . . So the pirates must find their relaxation among the Aleut maids.

Hilda avoided him, and when the dusk lowered, she

stole down to the village jail and called through the bars to Loring. Not only her voice came through. Her hand reached, and Loring shook it in an ancient comradeship. He did not know why the walls that held him seemed to fall away, and why his heart leaped as if it would break down the walls of his breast. In all his days there had been few moments like this. Few indeed of his splendid adventures had yielded such a bounteous return. The girl's hand was full of rich gifts. New hope . . . reborn courage . . . wondrous revelation.

He thought that her eyes were like stars in the dusk. At least, their light flashed starlike into his. He remembered Jupiter, lighted like a lantern in the gray twilight skies of autumn. He thought that her face was lovely as a pale tropic flower that he had seen in a Burmese jungle. At least it recalled him to dreams of loveliness, known far away and long ago, perhaps before flesh framed him, in a Lost Atlantis from whence men's souls have strayed.

Loring loved this girl. No use to deny it now. Nor was there any use in dreaming of it, and glorying in it. Their hands had touched for a moment in shadow —an ancient signal which even the most foolish lovers may pass and thrill to, but which even the wisest may never understand. But now the clasp was broken; and realities rushed in like shadows to a dying fire. Love must wait for a more mystic hour. It belonged with moonlight and flower-scent and such-like fragile things.

At a time and place like this—the fog-swept island torn by wars of greed—it was an outlaw and a stranger.

Still Loring could not keep his secret. His tone gave him away—warm and breathless in the chill dark—even though his words were only those of friendship. "I didn't think you'd want to shake hands with me again," he said.

"Why not?" Her tone was secretly anxious. "We're still on the same side, aren't we?"

"We're on the same side now, but I was on the other side when I first came. I don't have to tell you this—you've already guessed it. And I didn't know whether or not you'd forgiven me—and were willing to trust me—"

"Do you want to be forgiven—and trusted? Does it make—any—real—difference to you?"

"It means more than the whole world." He spoke solemnly, and if love itself is not a lie, he spoke true. Certainly he believed his own words—no light or shadow in the future, neither life, which he had always loved so intensely, nor death, which he had always scorned so proudly, seemed to matter as much as this girl's faith. It seemed that he had never really cared about anything before.

"When the men here didn't trust me, I didn't much mind," he went on. "I can stand on my own feet where men are concerned, and I wouldn't beg 'em to let me fight on their side. But I'll beg you, if I have

to. I want you to believe that I'm on your side to the finish—no matter what happens—and nothing can ever make me change again."

"Again?" she echoed gently. "You never really changed a first time, Paul. You were on our side all the while, but you just didn't know it. Cap'n Webber's son couldn't help but be on our side—he couldn't keep from fighting for the seals. It was the son of David Loring, a pelagic sealer and a man without a country, who brought the spies to the island. Now he's gone away—disappeared—and an American, Paul Loring Webber, stands in his place. Paul Loring Webber was never an enemy. He couldn't be."

"And it's all square, then?"

"Between you and me it's all square. I do trust you. I do believe in you. We'll fight together. But, Paul, you've got to fight as you never fought before." She spoke softly, so the suspicious guard outside could not hear.

"You're a soldier, you told me," she went on. "Well, let's see what being a soldier means. You're a military expert, so let's see you in action. We're outnumbered and unarmed and in prison—greater odds against us than you've ever heard of in any war before. Well, let's see what you can do. And then"—womanlike, and in woman's province as man's inspiration—"if you're the doughboy I think you are, we'll drive these pirates into the sea!"

CHAPTER XV

LONDON NICK'S attentions to Hilda were far from awkward. He was a man of the world, and when he wished, he could achieve a rare charm of manner and conversation. He had tremendous self-belief, which is always interesting, and his enlarged ego was not merely a shield, as in the case of most criminals, for a little and mean "inferiority complex." He did not feel inferior, a fact that saved her from boredom. Indeed, he considered himself quite good enough for her. Shrewdly, but also sincerely, he defended the mission that had brought him here, seeking to justify it in her eyes. Thus it was not surprising that on the second day of his dictatorship, his courtship seemed to gain ground.

Why not? The German girls made friends with and often married soldiers of the Allied Army of Occupation. The Sabine women had refused to return from Rome. It is the way of womankind, he reflected, to go with the conqueror. No wonder her eyes were not quite so cold and hard when again he met her on the village road.

She had appalled him at first. In spite of his self-confidence, there was a look about her mouth and a

whiteness around the roselike glow in her cheeks that depressed him inordinately. Now her glance was sullen rather than contemptuous. Plainly she still resented with all her heart his invasion of the island, but somehow—in one way or another—he had wakened her interest. No doubt she had begun to admire him in spite of herself—probably on account of his mastery and the smooth precision of his command—so to press his advantage he began to boast a little.

"But you can't win," she told him at last. "You'll end up in jail sure. The coast-guard officers are going to suspect something is wrong and come here and investigate."

"But how can they suspect it?" he replied jubilantly. "Thees island has been quiet for fifty years. I haf as much respec' for the American coas'-guard officers as you haf yourself, but they are not mind-readers. We haf arranged to send in regular reports the same as ever, so they cannot possiblee become suspicious."

A new light kindled in her eyes. For a moment Nick's attention almost wandered. Some inner voice warned faintly for him to be on guard—but at once the girl began to speak and drowned it out.

"Regular reports!" She echoed scornfully. "Why, you don't know what regular reports go out from here. All you know is the nightly records from the wireless station. For instance, you don't even know about the monthly medical report, that Doctor Eberhard was supposed to send last night."

She paused again, and confusion seemed to overcome her. It appeared that she had said too much, and had let slip a detail of island procedure which was most important for the island conqueror to know. Now she seemed to try to remedy the harm she had done.

"Of course that report is not an important one," she said. "They—they—wouldn't get suspicious just because they didn't get the—the—medical report. But—but—you probably will miss some of the important reports."

Nick grinned, bowed, and immediately walked away. He went straight to one of the Fisheries houses, occupied by the government physician. This was Doctor Eberhard, a middle-aged, heavily built man, who talked with a foreign accent. That Hilda had just come from this office, her eyes bright with excitement, of course Nick could not guess.

At Nick's birth, in his bleak village on the Don, "the quality of mercy" had been completely left out of his make-up. He knew many emotions—the love of music and of women, the lust of power and of gold—but compassion was a sentiment which he simply did not possess. Otherwise, he might have felt sorry for this man before him. Doctor Eberhard seemed so terribly shaken. He watched Nick's every motion as if with horror, and when he tried to speak he hissed through his teeth.

"What iss it?" he managed to ask at last.

Nick smiled and twiddled his cane. "Doctor, you are much attached to the island here, ees it not?" he asked gently.

Eberhard seemed to shiver. "What iss it you mean?"

"You like your position here, and though you are not a young man, you look forward to some years yet of professional service. In other words, little father, you do not desire to be remove'—remove;' I might add, in a most complete and efficient manner—and one of my own men installed here as the islan' physician."

"You mean—I do not want to loose my life?"

"Bah Jove, you are astute! Nor, comrade, ees there any reason why you should lose it. If you do your work properly, I can foresee many useful and happee years ahead of you yet. But lately, I regret to tell you, I notice an omission of your duties."

The doctor's eyes opened wide. "I don't understand—"

"Recollect a little, my friend. Was there not a report that should haf gone out by wireless on the medical condition of the island?"

The other shrank back. In all his hunting seasons Nick had never found such easy prey. Even the nobles of the old régime, doomed to death by the Russian Cheka before they ever came to trial, had stood up better than this. The game was so easy that it almost lost its zest.

"Oh, the medical report," Eberhard managed to stammer. "It iss of no importance—"

"Important or no, it ees my wish that it go forth the same as ever. Will you write it out now, or mus' I haf to—" And Nick's hand stole slowly backward.

The doctor seemed to rally the pathetic remnants of his courage. "If I refuse?"

"By all means, refuse if you so desire. There will, however, be an immediate vacancy in the official staff. And please notice that I say 'immediate'—"

No further threat was needed. The doctor shivered, then walked heavily to his desk. He sat down and took a pen in his shaking hand.

"But I tell you—the message iss not of great importance," he insisted. "All it iss, iss a general report of sickness conditions, and the names of the men who are sick or have come back to work after being sick last month—"

"Write it out jus' the same," Nick told him shortly. He was tiring of the game. "Make it jus' the same as if nothing out of the ordinaree has happened."

So the doctor wrote laboriously:

Chief Medical Officer
In care Bering Sea Patrol, Unalaska:

Monthly medical report for district North of Fifty-Three. Sealers Reuben Paine and Tom Hall back on the job. Same ordinary sickness in village but all native laborers able to work.

DOCTOR EBERHARD.

Nick screwed in his monocle, read the message, and smiled faintly in triumph. "Thank you veree much," he said. "I know we will get along famously in the future."

He took the sheet and walked out. He did not know that behind him the doctor's eyes were glowing like fire-balls. He did not know that his victim's servile manner dropped from him like a cloak, and he stood straight as a soldier of the Prussian Guards. "'Not of great importance!'" he mocked to himself. His hands, big enough for a champion's yet deft with a scalpel, clenched strongly. "We shall see! We shall see! We shall see!"

During this same afternoon, the second of Loring's imprisonment, came Hilda again to the window of the jail. Although at first she said no word, the men looked at her fixedly. They knew that she had brought news of vast importance.

Her eyes had a peculiar brilliancy. They drew the eyes of the dumb prisoners like magnets. Her face was white except for the bright line of her lips, her golden brows, and a roselike glow high in each cheek. Yet only those who knew her well would understand. To Martos, the Spanish pirate who had the noon-till-midnight watch at the prison door, she was only half hysterical from terror.

Yet Martos admired her. She reminded him of some of the blonde women that rose—golden amber set

among jet beads—from his own Madrid. He was sorry that Nick had declared her forbidden fruit. And expert with women, he would have liked to comfort her and to quiet her obvious fears. He hated to have to spy on one so obviously guileless, so crushed and impotent. Meanwhile, he failed to remember that her blondness was of the north, where the gales and the white drifts had made her spirit strong.

He listened only half-heartedly to the girl's talk.

"Wing is going to bring you some pie and coffee tonight," she told Loring.

Loring's eyes met hers, and the utter stillness of his body conveyed the effect of a violent start. His meager motions that followed would have puzzled Martos, had he seen them. Loring looked up to the sky, frowned at the calm blue, and then seemed to listen for the faint murmur of the sea. What had weather conditions to do with Wing's "clup coffee, pliece pie"?

"Tonight?" Loring echoed at last. "I'll need it worse a few days from now, when I'm tired of Aleut cooking."

"Tonight will be the last chance." And then, in a matter-of-fact voice, not at all as if she were divulging news of supreme importance: "Tomorrow you and all the men in there with you are going to be transferred to a different prison, where Wing can't reach you. Nick told me about it—he wants to put you where you won't have to be guarded and where you can't possibly

interfere with him when he starts active sealing operations tomorrow. He's going to send you all over to—Sea-Lion Rock."

Loring was thunderstruck. The proposal was as great a surprise to him as to his fellow prisoners. So London Nick was coming into his own! Until now he had followed Loring's plans almost exactly, but now he was striking out for himself. And certainly his cunning mind had conceived of a master-stroke. The marooning of the important prisoners on Sea-Lion Rock would simplify and practically guarantee the success of the expedition.

It would be a cruelly effective scheme. The bare bleak rock, storm-swept, exposed to every gale, curtained only by the fog, would quickly break the spirit of Nick's captives. The spirit of gladiators—of Swiss soldiers or of Arab horsemen—could not triumph over odds like these. The walls surrounding them would be the inviolate barrier of the sea. No guards need stand over them. They would be as helpless as if bound with chains. Practically all of Nick's force could calmly and confidently go to their sealing.

"Are all the other sailors and the St. Louis fur men going to be sent over with us?"

"Everyone that won't work under the pirates. Sea-Lion Rock will be used as a threat to make them hustle. Of course all of you, and Johnston, Eberhard and Page won't be given even a chance to work. You've already been sentenced."

The girl walked on, and now the prisoners gathered in a little, tense group. No more was there talk of distrust, one of another. The crisis had brought them strangely close. No more could they hide their plans from Loring, fearing that he might be a spy. Only one night remained in which they might strike; if they waited their cause would be lost. The seals would be doomed. The island would be ravaged. Their trust, as guards of the herds, would be broken.

"Loring, you're a trained officer and a military expert," Little Kris began tersely. "Tell us what to do."

Loring breathed deeply, and his old battle fervor swept over him. "The first thing to do is to break the enemy's lines of communication," he answered gravely. "That is the first principle of tactics."

"But how in heaven's name can we do it? In the first place, can Wing get us out of this jail?"

"I think so. I'm sure he means to try. His reference to the 'knife,' when he came yesterday, meant that he was planning something to help us, and he'd naturally try to free us first of all. I think he intends to cut the guard's throat."

"I hope so. But what can we do when we're free, Loring? I've thought of a dozen things, but none of them seem to hold out any hope."

He went on to explain briefly the various schemes that had occurred to him. His first was to take powder from the powder-house and topple down one of the towering radio masts. Thus communication with

Unalaska would be cut off, and when the throbbing seas of the air fell utterly silent, the coast-guard officers would surely send a party to investigate. However, the plan was not entirely sound. In the first place, the pirates would probably repair the damage. They would swarm like ants when the ant-hill is broken by a man's heel, and erect the tower again. In the second place, the station was closely guarded. Only a few of Nick's own men were admitted into the building, and these only through certain gates. Trespassers would not be questioned but simply shot down.

"And this isn't a guess," Kris said. "I heard the men talking when they changed guards. Hilda told me the same."

"It's the facts of the case, true enough," Loring agreed. "I planned myself that the station should be closely watched—to prevent harm to the apparatus—although the orders to shoot are Nick's, not mine. You see, the station is the weak spot in his armor."

"I wish you hadn't been so damn thorough, Loring," Kris told him. "But no use to talk about that now." So he went on to describe a scheme that Cap'n Andy had thought of—nothing less than the seizing of the Eider and putting to sea in search of help. But again there were almost insurmountable objections. Even if they succeeded in throwing the pirate watch into the sea, certainly they would be pursued by the Jutland. Only by the gods of luck and the witches of the fog could they escape. Besides, in all probability the Eider

was temporarily out of commission. Parts of her motor had probably been dismantled, as a guard against just such an attempt.

"They've dismantled her magnetos," Loring told him. "At least, that was the original scheme."

So the plan was dismissed. Helms, chief petty officer of the wireless station, now told of a project that had haunted him all the preceding night. Down near the dock, he said, was a navy speed boat—a high-powered gig with a roar like a distant typhoon. Perhaps he and four or five others could seize it and strike out for Unalaska in search of help. Small and rough-riding though it was, it could weather a fair-sized storm. However, the pirates might have taken away its extra supply of gas. If so, it would be useless as a pulling dory. The tank itself did not contain enough gas to cruise to St. George. What did Little Kris and Loring think about the scheme?

"If the raiders followed my original plans, they haven't left any extra supplies of gasoline around," Loring said. "I anticipated that some of the islands might have power boats stuck away here and there, and might try a dash for the mainland. It's the natural thing to expect, and I think Nick is guarding against it."

"That's that!" Kris spoke through his teeth. "Loring, you made these plans—it's up to you to find their weaknesses. Is there anything left that we haven't thought of?"

Loring's eyes began to glitter in the shadows. "The first principle of tactics is still left—'break the enemy lines of communication,'" he said. "You haven't mentioned their most important line—the line that goes straight to Siberia and safety."

"You mean their ship?" Little Kris caught his breath. "Great Lord, we couldn't seize that."

"No. She's too well-manned to seize." Loring spoke almost in a whisper, yet his words were like slivers of steel thrown off by a drill. Once more he was lost in his ancient passion of battle. The walls of the jail rushed away, and God knows what banners fluttered in the wind of his thought, what lances flashed in the sunlight of his zeal. Little Kris felt himself flushing. Lane, who had distrusted Loring at first, watched with widening, lurid eyes. An old truth was now reiterated: "When Loring talked, men saw visions." He should have been the Lord High Admiral of a corsair nation's fleet.

"We can't seize her," he repeated grimly, "but we can wreck her!"

No one answered for the space of five seconds. The very word "wreck" shot visions into these sailors' minds. They saw dark seas, empty skies, and a brave ship dying on a reef. They heard the wan cry of a gull—a sailor who had died at sea and whose spirit must ever skim the waves—who screamed in despair at the shattering hulk, and remembered his own dis-

aster. . . . Oh, it is not good to wreck a stanch vessel! It is worse than taking human life. . . . Yet tonight there was full cause. If the Jutland was wrecked, the island garrison would win.

The pirates would no longer menace the seals. The shimmering fur would be like the gold which Cortez found in Mexico—glorious to see but too heavy to carry away. Their mobility curtailed, they would be forced to crowd on the Eider and withdraw from the island. This was not a guess but a fact; no force dares linger in enemy country when its avenue of retreat is in danger. The coup would comprise war tactics of the first order.

Kris whirled to Storkersen. "What about it, Cap'n?"

The big Norwegian shrugged his vast shoulders. "It's all right wi' me. I've got der old hulk insured."

"I'm not asking you that. I mean—is the plan practical?"

Loring himself answered. That such an attack might be made had occurred to him when he had first planned the expedition. Day-dreaming, he had worked out its details from the point of view of the islanders. It had been his intention to forestall such a coup by destroying every small boat on the island, but fortunately he had never discussed this phase of his plans with his men. It might be that Nick had foreseen the danger and had placed a strong guard on

the ship, but there was a possibility otherwise, and it was the only fighting chance that remained.

True, weather conditions were not all that could be desired. Loring would have preferred to wait until there was a brisk inshore wind. However, he had been given no choice. The blow must be struck tonight. Besides, the set of the tides and the breeze from the east would be sufficient to drift an anchorless ship onto the rocks of the bay.

So Loring's plan was selected. Certainly it offered a greater chance of success than any of the others. Slowly, carefully, the men worked out the details. And who among them would volunteer for the work itself?

But this method of recruiting the crew proved impractical. There were eight men in the jail, and all eight wanted to go. Ellis explained that although he was past sixty and his lean arms lacked some of the power they had once known he knew the shoals and deeps of English Bay as a Hasan pearl-diver knows the Bahrein oyster beds. Besides, his age was ripe. If he were shot down, the loss would be slight; at best he would see the seals return but a few more years. Big Kris argued that he was a strong oarsman and therefore fitted to the work; Captain Andy stoutly replied that he was not only an oarsman, but a deep-water sailor, and just as he knew how to sail a vessel, he knew how to go about to wreck one. Helms and Lane, the two bluejackets, claimed that the task was

theirs by right—they were members of America's armed forces and thereby sworn to repel the country's invaders.

Little Kris wanted to go, but his offer was unanimously refused. As the commander of the islands, he must not risk his life at the front lines. He must stay with his people and, if the venture failed, keep their cause alive. He agreed at last, and the selection of the crew was finally left to him. For one of the two he selected Loring. He had devised the plan originally; besides, he knew the Jutland from bow to stern. Captain Storkersen would be the logical man to accompany him, but for several reasons Kris decided against him: the Jutland's captain had not fully recovered from his wound—sometimes he reeled about the cell—and Kris felt that one of his own men should take part in the expedition. They would protest if two former members of the raiding party were sent out alone.

As a second man the chief selected Big Kris. He was a strong man, in his prime, and his skill at the oars was a consideration of first importance. To each of the others Little Kris assigned certain duties; and now they must wait patiently for Wing to come.

The evening dragged away. The conquerors swaggered through the streets. The seal roar dimmed and rose again with the pulsing of the wind. And as the night was nearing its black gulf—the deeply curtained space between eleven and one—Wing's slippers came pat-pat up the road.

Martos, the guard, listened eagerly. He was tired of his watch, chilled through by the wind, and sick of looking at the icicle points of the stars gleaming through the tattered clouds. The only watch he had ever loved was that outside some sweetheart's bower, in the olive groves of Spain. The only wind that he could abide was the mild breath of the Mediterranean, and the only stars that charmed him were the warm lamps that lighted his Castilian heavens. He welcomed any break in the monotony of the night. He wanted to hear a human voice, instead of the interminable chanting of the seals.

He accosted Wing, but his voice was friendly. "Who come?"

"Wing," the Chinaman answered calmly from the shadows. "I bling clup coffee, pliece pie."

No wonder Martos glowed. This was a windfall of a rather pleasant sort. When he had heard the beautiful lady Hilda promise the gift, he had not expected to take any warm interest in it himself. As it happened, it had come at a most suitable hour. The coffee would brace him; the food would cheer him. Certainly there was no need to pass it through to the prisoners. Nor did he see any reason for calling Pete, the Alaskan who would take the post at midnight and who now slept, ready for any emergency, in a near-by native house. Certainly he could handle the entire portion himself.

"Who's it for?" Martos asked, as the visitor became a vague figure in the dusk.

"Fo' Loling. He likee pie fine. I cut you pliece too."

It turned out that Wing had brought a whole pie. He paused before the guard, and with his long knife cut out a big quarter. This he tendered on the knife-blade.

There followed a strange, grim little comedy. It appeared that the piece of pie started to slide off the knife. Forgetting his pistol, Martos tried to snatch for it. And then the long blade ripped the dark.

It was only Wing's whim that Martos did not instantly die. When the Chinese had set out from his kitchen, he had every intention of snipping off the Spaniard's life as a tailor snips a thread. It would have been a neat job, too—a little gentle stroking of the throat-flesh by the razorlike knife-edge—and there would have been no scream to arouse the sleeping guard. Now he found that the slaying was unnecessary. Wing's efficient soul rebelled against it. As it happened, the Spaniard's back was to the wall of the prison, and so fast was the attack that he could not even dodge. Because he must take the blow so tamely —as a seal takes the club of a killer—Wing checked it before it went home.

The point rested on the skin of Martos's throat. Through the skin and through the blade he felt the

tense strength of Wing's arm, ready to add an ounce or a pound of necessary pressure. And since Martos was a wise man—hoping to walk again with his love in the parks of Madrid—neither his hand nor his voice was raised in protest.

"Key," Wing instructed simply.

"In my pocket," Martos gasped in reply. "Don't keel me, Wing."

For he feared the rasp in the cook's voice. He was terrified by the black slanting hollows, dimly seen, that were Wing's eyes. To show his good faith he dropped his gun, and when Wing touched his shoulder he moved toward the jail door. With his free hand Wing took the key and liberated the prisoners.

Martos's watch was now done, and it was well that he should sleep. Surely he needed rest after almost twelve hours of guard-duty. So Storkersen smote him as he went by. His huge fist seemed to flatten out on the jailer's pale lips.

The last man in the line—it turned out to be Ellis—paused and bound Martos where he lay. It might be that the old sealer had lost some of his youthful strength, and thus could not be chosen for such perilous enterprises as were this night's business, but his hands had not lost their cunning. He could still tie a sailor's knot. And so that no sound should arise to disturb the pirates' rest, Ellis knotted his handkerchief across the prisoner's mouth. Thus it happened that the Spaniard would not eat the food that Wing had

brought. Neither would he break the monotony of his watch by conversation.

And now the night's work must begin in earnest. Each man went to his appointed duties. The only rift in the silence now was the clamor of the seals; but soon other uproar would be raised to the cold stars. The din of battle for which Loring had pined was surely not far off.

CHAPTER XVI

IN a little inlet in the village cove there lay a two-man skiff. The pirates had not found it, and even had they known of its existence, they would not have given it a second thought. It was merely a rowboat, prey to the first swell, and the most reckless prisoner would not start with it to St. George, much less to Unalaska. On calm days the Aleuts used it for halibut fishing beyond the cove.

Loring and Big Kris boarded it and rowed away into the night. But they were not seeking halibut. Tonight they would angle for a bigger fish. While the stars swam in the water like mysterious ocean fireflies, and the seal clamor rose and almost died away and bellowed forth again, the two oarsmen made their way to English Bay.

Presently they could distinguish the dim line of the Jutland's hull. She lay like a sleeping sea-beast, picketed on the meadows of the sea by her anchor chain. Yet she was a restless sleeper, because sometimes she wakened and stirred, tugging toward the shore, and the strong chain hauled her back. Lights she had none, and there were no voices blaring over the water from her deck.

Both men had been rowing softly, and now Kris began to scull. There was no oar splash to warn the crew; a slow-moving shadow on the water, the boat was almost invisible. Indeed, the most conspicuous thing about her was the wan faces of her oarsmen, and the pale phosphorescent trail that dimmed and died out behind her. Silent as a seal she made her way up to the towering hull. A moment more, and she was hovering in the shadow of the bow.

Running down was the great rope of iron that bound her to the sea's floor. Loring seized it gently, and standing up, searched for a shackle—a removable link which is introduced at intervals in every anchor chain. And now his purpose was apparent. By loosening the shackle he could sever the ship from her anchor and let her drift toward shore. Within a few hundred yards she would find rocks that would grip her like fangs. And here the next storm would have her at its mercy.

He must work in silence. The deck seemed to be deserted, yet if he aroused a watchman, his purpose might be defeated. He slipped a rope through the links above and below the shackle and half-hitched it so that he could lower the severed end softly into the water. Then he began to work out the shackle pin. Loosening it, a gentle tap with his wrench knocked it free.

Up to this instant all had gone well. The success of the venture seemed assured. The silent, slow drift

of the vessel would not be noticed until too late. But now the swell, breathing gently beneath him, seemed to stir in its sleep. It started as if from a dream, and smote at the side of the ship.

The blow was light—a mere breath compared to the titanic assault of which these green seas were capable—yet its result was utterly disastrous. The ship rolled forward, silently but with resistless power, and the guard-rope hummed and snapped. The severed end of the chain fell with a loud splash.

Even now, good luck might save the venture. The watchman might be below, or drowsing so that he would not notice the sound; or he might be a landlubber, who would attribute the splash to a leaping seal. But none of these things was true. A Swede named Oleson had the watch, and he was keeping it on the deck. He was lying, wrapped in his tarpaulin, under the wing of the bridge, but he was wide awake and musing about the stars. Last and most certain of all, Oskar Oleson was not a landlubber. He had been a seafaring man as long as he could remember. And long and long ago, when he was still a coastwise sailor on the Baltic, he had learned the exact sound of iron on water.

The ship was adrift. He knew this fact before the ripples of the falling chain had lapped the hull. He remembered that a second anchor was catted, ready to lower; and knocking out the pin, the heavy iron

dropped with a splash and roar of chain. Then he ran to the rail and peered down at the severed chain.

Instantly he understood. The shackle had not broken of itself. Black against the dark water he saw the outline of the rowboat, and its two occupants, who were already snatching at their oars. They had heard the second anchor fall, and they knew that silence was no longer a consideration. Their venture had failed, and now they must flee for their lives.

The Swede bellowed in rage. His cry rang over the ship, waking men from their sleep and tumbling them out of the hatch in a raging swirl. Meanwhile he smote on his own account. He seized a capstan bar—a batlike thing of iron—and hurled it like a javelin with both of his mighty hands.

If it had sped true, Loring's war would have been quickly over. It would have broken a horse's back as easily as his own. And it did break the back of Loring's wooden horse. It missed both men, but it literally demolished the bottom of the skiff.

The next moment was one of desperate crisis. As the seas jumped through the rent, both Loring and Big Kris jumped overboard. They had no other choice. The boat would founder in a few seconds, and besides, men were hurrying to the rail with guns. Only in the dark water could they hope for life.

The sea closed around them, for the moment mercifully hiding them. McCrae, the dark Scot, who was

the first to reach the bow with a sealing rifle, peered in vain for their swimming figures. He could see only two luminous trails where their cupped hands and threshing feet had disturbed the little light-giving organisms of the water.

Loring had loved the so-called phosphorescence of these northern seas. He had watched with delight the fire-dance of the seals, when every turn and twist of a sinuous body left a whirling wake of glory, and the whole bay was lighted with fairy light. Now the mysterious radiance might easily betray him to his death. Marksmen on the deck were firing at his lambent trail.

Fortunately they could not aim well in the dusk. The bullets made wicked little splashes on all sides of him. If the pirates had been content to pursue him only with rifle-fire, he might have reached the shore in safety. But now they were taking a surer way. Four or five of them were dropping from the low deck into a ship's boat that lay overside. The oars began to beat like hammers on a war-drum, with a deadly and remorseless rhythm. The boat gained with heart-breaking rapidity on the two swimmers.

Big Kris turned his head and spoke crisply in the water. "Separate so they can't catch us both," he directed.

This was good advice. It was well that one of their little detachment should return to tell the story of the mishap. They angled off from each other, swimming

with a sprinter's stroke. Because Loring was the nearer, the boatmen pursued him.

Loring swam as he had never swum before. His arms smote in powerful, wheeling strokes. He felt not the savage assault of the cold; he hardly heard the questing bullets splashing beside him. A swimming seal darted from his path, wondering no doubt what strange sea creature had invaded her playground, leaving a wake more glorious than her own.

But the chase was short at best. The boat was ever nearer. The riflemen on the deck had now stopped firing, for fear of hitting their own comrades. And now the boatmen themselves were in easy pistol range of their quarry. In a quick turn of his head Loring saw that one of his pursuers was standing up in the boat aiming a revolver.

It was not in Loring's philosophy to die futilely. He had not risked his life in half a score of wars to yield it up like a slaughtered seal's. Luck had stood at his side before; perhaps it would come to his rescue again. So he flung up his arms in a token of surrender and sank like a plummet.

The marksman's finger was already stroking the trigger, and he could not hold his fire. However, the bullet splashed harmlessly over Loring's head. When he rose to the surface again, arms were reaching for him. Strong hands clutched his garments and pulled him into the boat.

The oarsmen now looked to their other prey, but he

was well toward shore by now, so they let him go. They had bagged the game they wanted, anyway. A strong swimmer, Big Kris made the shore at last, staggered, struggled for breath, and vanished in the darkness.

Like the little yapping foxes that ran before him, Big Kris knew the rock-strewn trails by night. Not even the oldest Aleut sealer could lose him on St. Paul. He did not run like a driven deer into the arms of his foes, and indeed he avoided the village lights altogether. He made his way to the hill back of the village, the prearranged meeting-place of the island garrison.

The hill was something of a natural fort. It had played its part in the poaching wars of the past, and now once more had come into its own. It had been a lookout for Russian guards in the days before the American occupation, when adventurers' hearts were strong, when gentlemen of fortune were still abroad in numbers on the sea, when any wind might flutter a rover flag, and any wave might bring a seal thief to the island. The Muscovites had fortified the hill, and an old bronze cannon, with a gullet big and black as a shark's, had been forsaken on the rampart and still waited, on a mount of iron with its rusted rollers beneath, for its food of powder and shot that never came. Farther up on the hill were two large *barabaras* —moundlike structures of turf where Aleut families had lived before they had been driven to civilized ex-

istence in frame houses. In these thick-walled igloos the island defenders would make their last stand.

It had been agreed at the jail conference that all the white people who were at liberty or who could escape from their guards, and as many natives as possible, should assemble on this hill. Here they could at least present a united front. They were to bring what arms they could find—mostly shotguns which the natives had concealed, and a few rifles and revolvers which the raiders had not uncovered. Big Kris found that the rally had been at least partly successful. In a tense group outside the turf houses were perhaps fifteen white men: Little Kris, Johnston, Ellis, Doctor Eberhard and Page of the St. Paul Fisheries staff; Captain Andy of the Eider; a big engineer named Petersen who had been taken among the St. George prisoners and who had battered his way to freedom; Chief Petty Officers Helms and Lane of the wireless station; and four or five sailors who had broken from the storehouse where they had been imprisoned. Back of them hovered a half-dozen terrified Aleuts, and inside the houses were a number of women. These included the white wives of some of the officials and radio men, and, wide-eyed at the door, the little island school-teacher, Hilda Larsen.

The white men all had firearms, but of a motley sort. There was only one modern long-range rifle—a Springfield which Lane had been cleaning in his own quarters on the night of the raid, and which he had

rescued at the risk of his life. Of cartridges he possessed just what the magazine contained—a single clip of five—yet even these were a treasure beyond price. Lane would not waste them. His manner was oddly casual and confident. At the last and at the worst, these five shells should account for five of the enemy.

The other guns were mostly fowling-pieces, loaded with bird-shot. In the brief fall days, when the seals were lost in the sea and the first gales shrilled over the dunes, these weapons had been the terror of the terns, the puffins, and the emperor-geese, but they were hardly suitable ordnance for defending a barricade. Their utmost range was sixty yards. In addition to these there were two or three revolvers and in Petersen's hands an ancient Sharp which the Russians had left on the island sixty years before.

The men challenged Big Kris as he mounted the crest of the hill, and then grouped around him as he told his story. Yes, the venture had failed. He and his comrade had done their best, but luck had gone against them. He had escaped by the skin of his teeth—Loring had been taken and was now on the deck of the Jutland.

No one spoke for many seconds. The men fingered their guns. And then a girl who had stood listening from the doorway pushed near and touched Big Kris's arm.

"You say—that Loring is captured?" she asked.

Her tone was clear and full in the hushed dark.

The men's hearts, bowed down with despair at the news, began to leap with a strange and instinctive excitement. "Yes," Big Kris repeated heavily. "They caught him and took him to the ship."

"Is he injured?" Still she spoke with the same thrilling clearness.

"I don't know. They shot at him a lot of times, and once they were close. I don't know whether they hit him."

"He's probably dead by now." She paused and smiled wanly, as if at some tender memory. "If they didn't shoot him in the water, they'll kill him on the deck," she went on. "Just the same—it won't hurt to try."

"It won't hurt to try what?" Little Kris demanded.

"To rescue him. It's a crazy scheme, but what's life but crazy anyway?" She turned to big Helms, at her side. "You'll go with me?"

Helms sighed with relief. "Lord, I was afraid you were going to ask one of the other fellows. Surest thing you know I'll go with you."

So armed only with pistols, these two vanished in the darkness. If they were fools, at least they were of the high priesthood of folly, and their clansmen sit at drink at the roaring tables of Valhalla. They made their way toward the dock.

CHAPTER XVII

UNTIL now, Loring had suffered no ill usage at the hands of his enemies. The boatmen had picked him up from the water and had treated him as a respected prisoner of war. They did not forget that he had been their leader, and perhaps the best of them remembered that after all he had treated them fairly. Nevertheless, they made it plain that he must not attempt to escape. Their bullets would stop him quickly.

He was carried aboard the ship and into the warm cabin. To make sure that they would have him when they wanted him, they tied his hands securely behind his back. It always paid to make sure with Loring. He had forgotten more tricks than most men ever knew. Even London Nick had not thought of the possibility of wrecking the ship. Lucky for them that Oleson had heard the splash of the severed chain. And now they must be careful and see that Loring did not strike at them from some other quarter.

Sydney Bill, formerly mate of the Jutland and now her captain, sent a messenger for London Nick. In Nick's hands must lie the disposition of the prisoner. The two were old enemies; now they could settle their

score. No wonder when Nick was told the news that his white teeth flashed in the dark.

"So our bird ees in the cage!" he exulted. "I must say—out of respec' to my friend Loring—that my mind ees much relieved. But I cannot come now, comrade. We are veree busy here on the island. Most of our other prisoners flew the coop when Loring did, and haf fortified themselves on the village hill."

"You'd better come now, if you want to be sure of finding him," the messenger urged. "We've got him in the cabin, his hands tied behind his back, but how long he'll be there I'd hesitate to say. He's a human eel if there ever was one. Them guards will turn their backs, and he'll be gone."

The Russian twiddled his monocle. "Bah Jove, there ees more truf than poetry in what you say," he mused. "He might gif us the slip yet. Besides, there ees no hurry about these islanders. Let them roost on the hill till they get jolly well tired—we can take care of them in the morning. I will come now, my son. I will go wif you to the ship and see what can be done."

So they hurried to English Bay and boarded a gig. As they rowed out into the dark hollow of the night, Nick seemed unusually blithe. He was as a lover who goes to his sweetheart's bower. He sported with the oars; sometimes he laughed softly in the gloom. Shortly he came stalking into the cabin where Loring waited.

Certainly he could pride himself on his appearance. He had taken off the oilskins that had protected his trousers from wet grass; his cane was in his hand, and his monocle was in his eye. Yet even now his disguise was not perfect. Instead of the bland and debonair Briton, he was still the tiger of the Cheka. Through his monocle gleamed a sinister spark of red, like a ruby set in the ring of his iris. . . . And slowly, patiently, Loring began to test the ropes that bound his wrists.

Was this the end of a long war? Nick evidently thought so. Loring had never seen him so triumphant. "Cheerio, Loring!" he said—the greeting that he had given when they had met in this same cabin at Shanghai. "I see that you were pheezically unable to stay away from the good ship Jutland."

Loring's hair crept a little, but his voice when he replied was as calm as Nick's own. "On the contrary, I was physically unable to escape from her," he said. "Since mutiny has come upon her, I can't get shet of her too quick."

The sailors about the room stirred uneasily. Mutiny was a word that most of them did not like. Somehow it brought the blood to their brows, and a furtiveness to their gaze. The act itself was not so bad—the casting down of authority in some wild night of passion and madness—but they liked to call it by a milder name. And this wakening of shame was just what Loring was playing for. It was almost his last dim

hope that the men might stand between him and Nick's vengeance.

The Russian stiffened a little. Calmly he removed his monocle, wiped it carefully, and replaced it. "Little one, we are completelee in accordance," he remarked at last. "Which one of our literary men said that great minds run in the same channel? I had already decided to get you shet of her at once."

He paused for the sake of suspense. He hoped that Loring would question him as to his meaning, thus gratifying his delicate sense of the dramatic. But Loring's lips remained straight. He was hardly listening to Nick's drivel; he was trying to feel out the spirit of the sailors. Also, he was still hopeful that his wrists might prove stronger than his ropes.

But that hope perished swiftly. The seaman who had tied him knew his work. The chance that the sailors might defend him against the Russian was growing feeble too. As never before he realized his enemy's true proportions—faculties which in a medieval king would have been called greatness. If this man had been Nicholas III instead of Nicholas, the pseudo-Englishman, if his last name had been Romanof instead of some obscure appellation testifying to his bourgeois origin, the dregs of the gutter would not now sit in the seats of the mighty in Leningrad, and the Siberian prisons would not stand empty. True, his genius was not such that he could rise to power in civilized communities. In England, the land of his

envy, or America, the goal of his avarice, he could attain fame only as a super-criminal. Yet he had been a man of the hour in Russia—one of the terrible men of a most terrible hour—and if he made his expected million in seal fur, he might rise to eminence again.

In some respects Loring was his master. Men would follow the American where they would turn and stab the Russian. But now Nick had a powerful force on his side—his followers' lust for riches. Some of them no doubt would have liked to spare Loring—not out of pity, which they had mostly forgotten in childhood, but out of respect for a man's man—but they dared not risk their cause by crossing Nick. The whole success of their expedition now lay in Nick's hands, and they must not mutiny again. Moreover, Loring's very existence, the mere prolongation of his life, endangered their enterprise.

Loring faced the facts and believed he was already doomed. He could see no reason why he should hope on. Unless all signs failed, his last adventure of earthly life was almost done, and when he left the ship tonight it would be on a one-way road which he had skirted many times, but whose windings he could not dream. Ah, the pitcher at the well! It had gone too often. He had buffooned with Death—as is the adventurer's right—but the skit was over, the laughter was dying away, and the curtain was ringing down. He felt inner cold, rising nausea. . . .

No reason to hope on! Yet he did hope. He won-

dered if this was just a biological function—an instinct over which the mind has no control, and which would persist until his heart gave its last feeble beat, and his lungs sucked air for the last time. On the other hand, it might have some unfathomable meaning. . . . It might be the voice of some sense beyond any sense he knew.

His eyes, which had been leaping from one sailor's face to another, now wandered back to Nick. The Russian was carrying on the play. He was swinging his cane, squinting through his monocle, indulging his love for the dramatic in every way he could think of. "Great minds run in the same channel," he repeated. "You say, my friend, that you dezire to leave the ship at once. Curiouslee enough, thees ees the precise thing that I dezire also—that you depart from us as expeditiouslee as possible. We will now see what can be done."

"I suppose you mean to murder me, you bloodhound," Loring told him. Only those who listened hard heard a gasp running through the words.

Nick pretended to shudder. "An objectionable word—murder," he said. "I mus' ask you to be more refined in your speech. We will simplee carry out the honorable tradeetions of our predecessors."

And now Loring felt a moral fear almost as rending and fully as tragic as the physical terror which was crawling through his hair. God knew he did not want to weaken before Nick! He had secretly prayed that

he might hold out—that his self-mastery might bear him up till his last dying muscle let him fall. To prove in the end a coward would ridicule his whole life. It would be mockery not only of himself, but of his creed, of his philosophy, of his bright-winged gods of adventure. It would be much more—nothing less than a monstrous, evil cynicism, suggesting that human dreams are vain and that man is but a base slaveling after all. . . . Yet already he felt himself breaking. His eyes were no longer narrow and glittering, meeting Nick's fairly, but had opened wide in staring dread; and now his lips opened too.

He was no longer able to confront his foe with silent contempt. True, he did not plead—might his sea-gods spare him that!—but he evinced curiosity; he asked questions.

"What are you going to do?" he cried.

"You dezire to know?" Nick's voice showed that he was much gratified. "I haf already told you—we are going to follow the precedent set by the fathers of our profession. You see, my son, you haf found me in a poetical mood. When you leaf the vessel, it ees my fancee that you leaf it according to an ancient and honorable pirate custom. But I assure you there will be no coarse rover tricks like tongue-cutting, and so on." He turned to his frozen, watchful crew. "Oblige my friend Loring by putting out our longest plank over the taffrail."

A cry started in Loring's throat again, but he bit

his lip and held hard. For an interminable three seconds he breathed deeply and in silence. "You mean to make me walk the plank?" he asked at last.

"That ees it preciselee. An artistic conception, ees it not? Since your wrists will remain tied, we will omit the formalitee of shaking hands wif you in farewell. Now will you come wif us, my friend, or would you rather that these men gif you a lift?"

Loring glanced once at the faces of the crew. These were like metal, out of which their eyes glowed luridly. There was no help here. The men were under the spell of Nick's voice. Besides, they dared not let Loring live. He might yet come between them and their spoil.

Nick would have liked to dally a few minutes more —prolonging the play he loved so well—but his men were anxious to finish the work quickly. Perhaps when the sea covered Loring, they could feel safe . . . safe not only from his cunning, but from their own shame. Otherwise his very presence would continue to remind them of their mutiny—a deed which, by the code of the sea, is worse than taking life. Two of them hastened to lay the plank, and the others moved grimly toward their prey.

Loring faced them with contempt, and then walked toward the stern of the ship. In this, to all intents and purposes the last moment of his life, he could not bear to be manhandled. To be snatched and hustled by these men would destroy the last of his dignity,

fought for so hard. If his hands were free he could give them a good run—ending his last battle in glory and blood—but he could not abide to make himself ridiculous. He walked straight and mounted the plank.

He would not break down, after all. He would not plead; neither would he cry out. His eyes were dilated, his face was wet with sweat cold as the Bering fog, and he felt violent nausea, but his thews were strong and his head was erect. For all that he had stolen the stage from Nick, the latter eyed him in instinctive admiration.

"Perhaps you haf something to say before you go," the Russian suggested quickly. "A will and testament, as it were—"

The gorge rose in Loring's throat. "I will you to the Devil!" he answered with sudden fierce emphasis. And he meant exactly what he said. Not for an instant did his hearers dream of taking him any way but literally. It would not be for Loring to refer to a devil of conscience, or any other weak-kneed spirit of savant's prattle. He meant the Devil by which David Loring had sworn, the Thing that waits in the darkness when murderers die, the Horror that snatches away the sin-scorched soul. Loring had gone back to the simple wisdom of mariners. He spoke not of what he had read in a book, not of what some gibbering landlubber had told him, but of what had been actually near him during storms at sea, of what had beckoned

him in his hours of sin, and of what he had seen, horrible beyond words, in repentant dreams. This man was no fresh-water sailor. His life was brief, but it had been full. No wonder the listening seamen started, and watched him with wide eyes.

Nick's eyes flashed, and he smiled dimly. "He'll get you first," he said simply. For the moment he seemed to forget to pose. "Tell him I'll be along later."

"Sooner than you ever dreamed," Loring prophesied. "I've got a hunch—the hunch of a dying man. You'll pay for this, you Muscovite dog, and quick too. Remember what I say when I'm gone."

His voice rang over the still sea. In the fervor of his prophecy, he had all but conquered the horror of death. Nick recoiled a little, and his monocle fell from his eye and dangled on its tape.

"I'll forget all about it before breakfast," he said. "Now jump, before I tell my men to push you off."

And now the victim turned his back on the ship and its crew. He walked farther onto the plank and gazed out over the sea. A baffling silence seemed to hold. The waters seemed to poise, waiting to spring up to meet him. And now the sharp edge of reality had passed off, a last mercy to the prisoner. The whole episode was more like nightmare than fact—horror, mystery, sweating hands and creeping scalp, yet a strange sense of security abiding still, as if in remembrance that it was only a dream after all.

The night had begun to wane. The early Alaskan summer dawn was not far off. Indeed, the eastern sky was glimmering, and he stood in silhouette against it. He could see the dark headlands emerging from the deeper darkness of the sea. He raised his head to listen for the last time to the seals.

The clamor was faint at first, but the rising dawn-wind brought it stronger. And then the strangest thing of all the strange drama of his life came to pass. It seemed nothing less than the advent of the supernatural.

There was a new note in the wind-blown voice. It was a rumble that mounted fast as fire to a veritable roar. It was as if a thousand seals were swimming toward him, bellowing as they came. And then, with a deep and torturing gasp, he perceived the truth.

The seal voice itself had not changed. It was still far off, still just a chant on the wind. It had only blended with another sound—a roar over the water that was sweeping up to him, nearer and nearer, until it was thundering in his ears. It was not a steady blare; it was a booming tattoo, the separate sounds whirring together like the wings of a giant bird.

Such it was—a sea-bird that sped so light and fast over the water that it seemed almost to fly. It was the navy power-boat, property of the wireless station, with her exhaust wide open, running at top speed.

The cove where she had been hovering, waiting for her chance, was only two hundred yards from the ship,

and she had covered three-fourths of this distance before Loring recognized her. He had scarcely time to jump before she was streaking alongside, a roaring, darting shadow, close to the water. He leaped as far as he could; she checked and swung a little from her course. He lay flat as he could on the water and two powerful arms snatched his shoulder. Then, listing with his weight but with rapidly increasing speed, the boat flew on.

The pirates had no chance to shoot. They did not even think of shooting until too late. As Loring was torn through the water, still clutched by a man in a blue coat hanging half overside the boat, the only sound that followed him was one sharp cry in the Russian tongue—a curse, no doubt, yet with such soldier's glory in it that it sounded like a cheer.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN the boat was well out of rifle range, the driver slowed up and Loring was hauled aboard. He was perfectly conscious, but no breath was in his lungs, and none of the light words which adventurers love sprang to his lips. He simply lay in the bottom, watching the racing darkness check and grow still.

"Take the wheel, Helms," a voice said. "I'll look after him."

So the man was Helms, the chief petty officer in charge of the station! No wonder the grip at his shoulders had been powerful. And the voice in the dark? Far gone indeed must Loring be not to recognize this. Surely there was a just and poetic fate working in his affairs.

Helms cut Loring's ropes and went forward; Hilda came creeping to his side. She knelt down in the cockpit and peered into his face.

"Hurt?"

"No."

"Not at all?"

"Absolutely not at all. The fellows on the ship didn't ever get around to it."

"We weren't much too soon though, were we?"

Her voice had its first note of triumph. "We saw you on the plank against the sky-line." Then ministering to him: "You're cold, aren't you?"

"Pretty cold. My clothes have been wet on and off all evening."

"Then I'll share my coat with you. I can't let a man freeze because of the conventions. We're pretty good friends anyway, aren't we?"

So they shifted about till he was leaning against her breast. She spread her coat over him, and to hold it her arm crept about his shoulders. She was entirely calm and casual about her position, and therefore it was strange that Loring should hear her heart beating like a tom-tom against her side.

The arrangement proved surprisingly satisfactory. There was a gracious warmth under the coat that was something more than the mere exclusion of cold. Even Hilda's casualness could not dull the most exquisite half-hour Loring had ever known. When he groped and found her hand, she did not draw it away.

"Hands cold?" she asked.

"Freezing."

"Nonsense. They're warm as toast."

Yet their hands did not part. They must sever soon enough as it was, each to do its share in the work that yet remained. The night grew pale; the boat was run as silently as possible toward a cove under the village hill where it must be forsaken. And presently Loring looked up to the straight, high-bred line of the girl's

chin, out from her throat. Her well-tanned skin looked like ivory in the dusk.

"Hilda!" This was the first time he called her so.

"Yes?"

"I've got to talk a little. I can't take things as calmly as you do. You took a deadly risk to save my life. So did Helms, but he's a man, and things like that are expected of men in times of war. But it wasn't expected of you. Why did you do it, Hilda?"

She smiled dimly down at him; he could see the curl of her lips in the dawn. "I couldn't let a man die, could I?" Her tone was hushed, almost childlike. Her small fingers pressed his palm.

"Is that the only reason?"

"I don't know." Her smile faded, and her eyes were round. "I haven't had time to decide. Maybe I just saved you as I should any man who fought on my side. I won't know until all this awful fight is finished, and I can think things over."

"That's fair enough." He kissed each of her hands in turn, a sign which he had never before given to any woman in the world. "When the fight's over, I'll come to you again, and you can tell me what you've decided. But, Hilda, I want to tell *you* something now—something I might not be able to tell you later."

"You mean—that you think you're going to get killed?"

"No. I haven't the least intention of getting killed. I'm free again, and able to fight, and if there's a

chance on earth, I'm going to win. I just meant that I might never find the courage to talk straight to you again."

"You'd better hurry then. We're almost to the cove."

"Hilda, in certain places in the Orient the people have a queer idea connected with life-saving," he told her. "They think that if one person saves another from death, the saved one's life belongs to its rescuer for all the rest of his days. Some of 'em believe that the same ownership goes on into the next world. Well, I'm beginning to believe that there's something in it."

"You mean—you belong to me?"

"Something like that. Somehow I feel that I'm not a free agent any more. The fact that you risked your precious life to save mine puts a tremendous responsibility on me—I've got to justify the value you put on my life. I can't play fast and loose with it any more. I can't feel that I have only myself to answer to. I've got to answer to you too. You've got a sort of an investment in me—and from now on I've got to be worth that investment."

"And you weren't, up till now?"

"Hilda, as I lie here facing the facts, I'll have to tell you that my life wasn't worth the risk of one of your fingers. I hate to admit it—I was never properly modest and meek—but it's the truth. You know why I came to this island. I was after loot. All this

trouble is on my own head—and this is just one example of my folly. Any value that my life has began after I began to know you."

"It is worth something as one of the defenders of the island," she told him.

"Yes, but that was on account of you too. Tonight wasn't the first time you pulled me out of the sea. The first time was several days ago—what you told me in Wing's kitchen. At least you gave an anchor to a drifting ship. And now—you've given a captain to it."

"Didn't it have any captain before?" she asked gently.

"No, it was a derelict. It couldn't hold a course. But it can from now on, Hilda. With you as its captain, it will go wherever you want to sail it. And it's a stout ship, though I do say it. It can buck the seas!"

He spoke in his youth and power. His heart was thrilling; she felt his splendid shoulder muscles ripple and creep against her arm. "A stout ship, Paul," she echoed. "It may be that I wouldn't be afraid to trust myself in it."

Helms had now shut off his engine and was letting the launch drift in to shore. He and his two passengers crowded into the bow to whisper their plans. Briefly and definitely they dismissed the idea that they might start for Unalaska in the launch to summon help for the island garrison. The supply of gas in the tank was sufficient only for a few miles. The boat had no sail, no adequate supply of water and food,

and for them to lie adrift in the trackless wastes of Bering Sea would simply mean suicide in an ugly form.

Could they go in the whale-boat in which the spies had come to the island? It had a small sail and was stored with provisions. But Nick had forestalled this possibility. He had hidden the boat, and Storkersen, who had looked for it, had been unable to find it. Besides, it would have been a meager chance at best. The boat was small, and the sea immeasurably broad.

They landed silently and made their way through the fading night to the village hill. Not yet had the pirates thrown out guards around the base of the hill, and the only human being who crossed their path was old Wing, plodding steadily up the slope with a pail of water in each hand.

Wing, it seemed, had stolen another march on the enemy. He had been busy all night. The garrison would not be forced to yield at once for lack of food and water. Nick had stationed guards over the common water taps, but he had overlooked the old native bathhouse which was connected with the village spring. Wing had also managed to collect food from some of the native houses.

"Make you clup coffee, click," he told the shivering Loring. His slanting eyes puckered at the corners as he grinned. "To-mollo maybe give you pliece pie."

Loring took the drink gratefully. He dried his clothes in one of the *barabaras,* resting meanwhile, and when the morning was full, he talked battle-plans with

Kris. To the island cause he offered his arm, his full measure of military skill, and, if need be, his life.

"The chance doesn't look too good," he summed up at last. "We might as well face the cold facts. Our position is not secure by a long shot. They can overwhelm us any time they want to, if they're willing to lose enough men. It wouldn't be so bad, though, if we were playing for time. By fair luck we might hold them off for a few hours, at least. But we've got to play for victory."

"We *are* playing for time," Kris told him.

Gleaming, the eyes of both men met. "What do you mean?" Loring murmured. "Is there any chance that help will come?"

"Yes—a small chance, anyway. You haven't heard about Doctor Eberhard's medical report. It went through yesterday, and it ought to be delivered to the commanding officer of the Bering Sea patrol this morning."

But Eberhard's message had been delayed. When it arrived it was glanced at by a new orderly, who concluded naturally that it was merely one of the hundreds of routine government dispatches for which there was no need of immediate action. The day being Sunday, he did not disturb his officer's rest by carrying the message to his house. The commander did not hear of it until late afternoon, when the two men met in the Unalaska road.

"The medical report's on your desk, Captain Boswell," the orderly said.

The officer peered curiously. "What medical report is that, Martin?"

"It's from some doctor at St. Paul, sir. The message says it's the report for the district north of fifty-three parallel. It's just the monthly report addressed to the medical officer in charge of you, sir, and nothin' in it."

"But I have nothing to do with St. Paul doctors. There's no medical officer attached directly to my office, as you very well know. Why should he send a report here?"

His curiosity wakened. Captain Boswell went to his office and read the telegram. It read:

> Monthly medical report for district North of Fifty-Three Sealers Reuben Paine and Tom Hall back on the job Same ordinary sickness in village but all native laborers able to work
>
> DOCTOR EBERHARD

At first he looked at it in utter bewilderment. "Martin, has Doctor Eberhard gone crazy?" he demanded. "I think I'll wire back and ask him what's eating him."

The orderly's expression was blank. "It's sort of a queer-soundin' message, ain't it, Captain Boswell?"

"It certainly is. But on second thought, I think we'd better wait a little before we wire him. Perhaps

this is something new—a government regulation we're not on to yet—and we don't want to show our ignorance. Those board of health fellows are equal to almost anything."

Captain Boswell read the message again. His brows seemed to draw together. "Martin, is there any district in Alaska that's called the district 'North of Fifty-Three'?" he asked in a startled tone.

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Not that I know of, either. I thought it was just an expression and, by Jove, I believe it is. It's a famous expression, to tell the truth, and I think Kipling originated it."

"I guess he did, sir," Martin pondered deeply. "But it isn't in 'Gunga Din,' sir."

"No, it isn't in Gunga Din. It's in one of his other poems, but I can't think which one. Martin, can you scare me up a set of Kipling anywhere in the village?"

"I guess so, sir. But—but—"

"You want to know why? Because this might be a code message. I don't think Eberhard is crazy—if I remember him right, he's a mighty cunning old Boche—and it looks to me like he's trying to tell me something in this message that he doesn't want to come right out and say. This 'North of Fifty-Three' business looks as if it has been dragged in by the heels, as a sort of hint. And is Tom Hall an Aleut name—or Reuben Paine?"

"They certainly ain't. They'd be named Alexandria-

vitch or Kostomowsky. And there's no white men up there by those names what I know of, sir."

"Just the same, I seem to remember hearing them somewhere. Martin, go and scare up those Kipling books."

While the orderly was on the errand, Captain Boswell looked at his maps. Tacks on the board indicated the approximate position of all four of the cutters under his command. It happened that not one of them was in waters adjacent to St. Paul. They had an immense area to patrol, and it had been the wise and necessary government policy that pelagic poachers should be warded off only by the occasional cruise of one of the vessels around the island. One of the four was at present at St. Lawrence, settling a dispute that had arisen among the natives; another had gone all the way to Attu to investigate the landing of a small party of Siberian Bolshevists two weeks before; the third was adjusting labor troubles among the fishermen in the far corner of Bristol Bay; and the fourth, the nearest, was on her way back for orders after rushing a dying man out to Unga, on the Shumagin group in the North Pacific. This ship was the Enterprise, in command of a fighting Irishman named O'Day. So to O'Day, Captain Boswell sent a code telegram from the U. S. wireless station at Unalaska.

Return at full speed. Don't slow up for fog. Will wireless further orders when you reach Unimak Pass

Boswell admitted that he was playing a hunch. But before now, in the annals of the sea, hunches had won battles, saved lives. . . . By the time the Enterprise reached Unimak Pass, through which she must sail to reach Bering Sea, he hoped to have something definite to go on—perhaps a definite order to give.

When he returned to his office, he found Martin surrounded by books. The people of the lonely little town of Unalaska read much in the long winter nights, and Kipling was to be had in quantities. There was an armful of "Plain Tales from the Hills," a wealth of "Kim" and "Mine Own People," and at least a half-dozen "Barrack Room Ballads." Boswell forgot all else to dig into them; he forced his eyes away from many a favorite passage which, though absorbing, had nothing to do with "North of Fifty-Three"; he read through his dinner hour, meanwhile grasping at an elusive memory.

North of Fifty-Three! Still the reference escaped him. It was not until nine o'clock, when the shadows were long, that the search ended suddenly in an ancient desk in the library of Louis Straus, the merchant, agent of the historic Alaskan Commercial Company of Dutch Harbor.

"I've been thinking about that quotation, and I finally remembered it," Straus told him. "It goes this way:

"'Your words in your teeth,' says he.
'There iss no law of God or man runs North of Fifty-Three.'"

"But what is it from?" Boswell demanded.

"I'm not sure, but I think it's from 'The Rhyme of the Three Sealers.' I've got it somewhere, if I can just think where. I cut it out one time because it's about St. Paul."

They were on the keen scent. Presently Straus unearthed the poem from his desk. And now the quotation, in its entirety, lay before them:

Tom Hall stood up by the quarter-rail. "Your words in your teeth," said he.
"There's never a law of God or man runs north of Fifty-Three."

Tom Hall! The officer's eyes raced down the lines. And presently he encountered another familiar name:

Then Reuben Paine cried out again before his spirit passed:
"Have I followed the sea for thirty years to die in the dark at last?"

Reuben Paine! And who were Tom Hall and Reuben Paine? The poem told him plain enough. They were seal pirates of early days—the poem dealt with their effort to steal seal from St. Paul Island, and their subsequent fight. And now a sentence from Eberhard's telegram flashed in bright letters to Boswell's eyes:

Reuben Paine and Tom Hall back on the job.

For a moment Boswell said not a word. His eyes glowed, as if the fire that had burned in Eberhard's

eyes had jumped like a high-tension spark across the sea to his. The wireless of two minds that had at last established communication! When finally he looked up into Straus's pale face, his hands had begun to gnarl.

"Are you going to send a wireless, asking what's up?" Straus was inquiring.

"No, I can't do that. It might fall into the wrong hands and possibly start a massacre. I'll simply wireless him that his medical report will be given prompt attention."

"Which means that you're going to get action right away," Straus exulted.

"As soon as those sea-greyhounds of mine can rip. Even so, we may be too late. You see, Straus, I can read something in the message that I missed at first."

"Something besides 'Tom Hall' and 'Reuben Paine' being on the job again?"

"Yes. Look at this phrase—'same ordinary sickness.' Do you see anything queer about it?"

"I don't yet—"

"Read the first letters of each of the three words."

Straus read, and his heart pounded like a reef-wrecked ship. But it would stand the strain. This was the same heart that had upheld him bravely in a boyhood journey from a far country, that had carried him valiantly over the rough road of the years, and had borne him up the Alaskan trails to a place of power and free-given respect. "Good Gott!" he cried. "Then

what you standing there for? Why aren't you over to the wireless?"

Captain Boswell looked calmly at his old friend. "I can go and wireless Eberhard, as I said, but I doubt if the message will be delivered. O'Day is already sailing at top speed, and any time before he gets through Unimak Pass will be time enough to send him his orders. In the meantime we've simply got to bite our nails and wait."

"These waters are so infernal big," the other complained. "It takes so infernal long to get anywhere. Even as it iss, O'Day might come too late."

"Yes. It might be too late already. Straus, this is a situation of terrible possibilities. Instead of a fleet of ships, for once I wish that I commanded a squadron of airplanes, so the guardsmen could reach St. Paul before another night. I have an ugly premonition, which I can't force away."

CHAPTER XIX

IT SEEMED like old times to Loring, as he stood on the rampart and looked at the battle array. It was an old story, sweet to recall, to be peering down from some wild hill to a superior force below. So many of his wars had been this kind. As a rule they had been fought in just such a lost and lonely land—one in a swamp beside a Brazilian river, another in a Nicaraguan jungle, a third on a windy plain in Chinese Turkestan, beneath the glory of the Kuen-lun Mountains. There had been usually the same objective, which was loot. There had been a similar surprise attack, swift and silent, from beyond the frontier, by hard-eyed, desperate men that came to rape and pillage. The invaders had been well armed, the same as now; the defenders carried such motley weapons as they kept in their houses.

True, the engaging forces had usually been larger, but with no higher spirit or greater courage. No wonder Loring's old love flamed in him again, and his eyes lighted up with their ancient warrior zeal.

He could make the most of conditions like these. He was used to leading men armed with fowling-pieces. And though the island defenders were better dressed

than the tattered rebels that usually rallied about his banner, this fact did not detract from their prowess. He looked over the little force with pride. Whiskered Big Kris, dark little Johnston, bland Petersen, the veteran Ellis—all four of them musketeers of no mean order. Then Helms and Lane, fighting men aforetime, and five or six bluejackets. Little Kris, surrounded by a tense, quaking group of Aleuts. It was a garrison of parts!

By common consent, Loring took charge of the defense. He had more battle experience than any of the sailors or the Fisheries chiefs. So he surveyed the ground with the skill of an army engineer. He laid out the combat line and superintended the throwing up of earthworks. Finally he gave each man his post to hold and his final orders. Then the force waited for the invader.

It was almost noon before Nick acted. A lone Aleut carrying a white flag came plodding up the hill. "Big boss down there—he send message to Little Kris," the man explained, when the garrison gathered around him. "He say—'offer terms.'"

"What terms does he offer, Micah?" Little Kris asked tersely.

"He say—give up—surrender—right away. He say he no hurt white people who live on island—not you, not Johnston, not Johnston's wife, not nobody who live here all time. He put you all on Sea-Lion

Rock or Otter Island, and send over grub. But he say he kill Cap'n Webber—"

"Kill who?" Kris broke in.

Micah, the native, looked bewildered. "I mean him," he said, pointing to Loring. "Natives' old friend, who came back. Loring, you call him. Big Russian boss he say he kill Loring, but he say you no care about that anyway. He say Loring cause all trouble in first place. But he tell big lie. Native know you no want to let Cap'n Webber get killed. And native—he fight like hell—"

"Go on with the message," Kris directed. "What else did the Russian tell you?"

"He say he kill Wing too. He mighty mad at Wing. He say Wing, him spy, so he goin' kill him sure."

"A spy! Wing hasn't spied on them."

"No? Well, anyway, the Russian and his men all mad at him. Wing makem big trouble last night, they say. First he pretty near stick knife into guard, Martos. Pretty soon he *did* stick knife into feller who look like native—Tom Sing, they call him."

Kris whirled to the old cook, who waited patiently behind him. "Wing, did you knife somebody?"

The yellow man looked to the right and to the left. His slanting eyes moved a little in their sockets, but remained dull as bottle-glass. At last he nodded. "I kill some fell' las' night," he said.

For a long second there was no utterance. Loring

wondered at the strange things of heaven and of earth. The seals roared, and the fog blew across the dunes.

"How did it happen, Wing?" Little Kris asked in a low voice.

"Las' night—I go black and fole, catchee watel, catchee glub. I go alound village stleet, sneak in old native bathhouse. In the dalk I see fell' coming, I hide. He got something in his alms. I see pletty click—he got little Anna Viatkovitch."

The men nodded grimly. Anna Viatkavitch was the ten-year-old daughter of one of the native sealers.

"He hold mouth so she not scleam. Pletty click he saw me, but he not see me click enough."

This was evidently all the story. Up to this time Wing had not thought it important enough to tell. "At least, there's one less member of the enemy," Loring commented. Then, turning back to the native: "So Nick is going to make an example of Wing, is he?"

"No understand 'example.' He just show natives if they make trouble, no work good, they go up the spout pretty quick."

"And what did he say he'd do if we refused his terms—if we won't surrender?"

"He say he going to begin shooting. If you don't give up, come down hill, let him kill you and Wing, ship all the rest to Sea-Lion Rock, he going to 'open fire' with rifles. Then if you no come down, he going to come up here and get you, with all his men. If they have to come up and get you, they going to raise hell.

Kill anybody they want to. Take any women they want to."

This was the ultimatum. The chiefs of the island gathered to confer. They were white and tense, but already they had the air of veterans. They would not be easy to stampede, or quick to yield. Loring looked at them in growing satisfaction.

"It's up to you," he told Little Kris. "If you say so, Wing and I will march down and give ourselves up—at least I will, and if I can read that old yellow leather, Wing will too. I admit I don't want to, but I don't see how I can get out of it, considering this whole scrap is on my head."

"Counting out your own side of it, would you advise us to surrender?" Little Kris asked.

"Not as long as there is a fighting chance. Nick's promises are not worth the breath he used to tell 'em. He'll murder Wing and anyone else if he feels like it. And when he leaves the island—he intends to take Hilda Larsen with him."

"If the revenue cutters come in the meantime, he can't take Hilda with him. He'll be licked right then, and we'll be sorry we wasted human lives in fighting him."

"Well, you're going to waste Wing's life if you don't fight him. Kris, if the coast-guard vessels come at all, they're going to come soon. By holding out a day or two you can save Wing's life and mine too. I'll admit that you don't have any responsibility for

me—this is my own bed, and I'm lying in it—but certainly you have for Wing."

"And you're sure they'll kill him?"

"Just as sure as God. Nick loves to kill better than a weasel. And here's another thing, Kris. Wing and I may not be the only price. Suppose help doesn't come at all. Then you'll lose Hilda—in a way that you don't like to think of."

A little stir, like a wind, went about the listening circle. One man after another seemed to be shaken by it. But Little Kris remained cold. His thought moved without passion, as was his obligation. "I thought you said that if help doesn't come, we'd have no chance anyway."

"We shouldn't have much of a chance, that's sure, but it would be a better chance than Wing and Hilda would have. It would be a better chance than the seals would have, if that makes any difference to you. The way things are, it looks like we might kill enough of the gang, when they charge us, so that the rest of 'em will be afraid to stay on the island."

Kris waited a long time. He lighted his pipe and smoked until the air wheezed through the stem. "I'm willing to take a chance if the rest of you are," he said at last. "When the Big Chief of the Fisheries in Washington sent me up here, he told me it was my job to protect the seal, and I sure know what that old Irishman would say if he were in my shoes. After all, I haven't any choice. When the wolves come down

on the fold, the sheep-herder has to scrap whether he wants to or not. It's my job and my life. How do you feel about it, Johnston?"

Johnston, the island agent and next in authority to Little Kris, sighed deeply with relief. "I'm for it!" he said. "Soak it to 'em."

"You, Ellis?"

"Listen, Kris." Ellis's voice was casual, as always, but his eyes burned. "I was born just too late to get in on the Civil War. And I've been missing all the wars since—I was just too old for the Spanish-American scrap, and of course they didn't want any grayheads when the boys fought the Boche. I'd about decided I was going to have to die with my boots off, in bed. And now comes along the neatest little war, for the most worth-while cause, that any old galoot could ask for. I'm with you till the last pirate is hung."

Once more a stir moved around the circle. Eyes lighted up like lamps when the lighter makes his rounds. And now Little Kris was caught up too. When he spoke again, his voice had a deep ring. "How about you married fellows—you, for instance, Page?"

Page was not too old to have served in the last war. He was too young. Even now he was hardly out of his 'teens. But Kris looked at him and saw a mature man—the kind of man that moved like the wrath of God through Argonne Forest.

"I think my wife would rather I'd fight for her

than turn her over to the mercy of those thugs," Page said simply. "I think I'd rather myself."

"You, Doctor?"

Doctor Eberhard had been born in a foreign country. There was a time, not many years since, when Americans of his accent and name had been hounded and harried like thieves in the street. Yet he had borne no ill will. He had been a patriot then, and he was a patriot now. America was worth fighting for, he concluded, in spite of its quota of fools. St. Paul, particularly, was his home—he was devoting his life to its people—so really there was no need for Little Kris to ask him the question. Indeed, ever since Hilda and he had framed the "medical report" to the commanding officer of the Bering Sea patrol, he had been on the firing line.

He voted against surrender, and so did Big Kris and Petersen and Captain Andy. Last of all, Little Kris turned to Helms, in command of the naval wireless station. Would the wireless men, considering that they had nothing to do with the seals, help fight off the seal pirates?

"It's true we haven't anything to do with the seals," Helms told him. "They're the Fisheries business. But we're sworn to protect the territory of United States against armed invasion. If there was a commissioned officer here I'd let him decide, but as it is, I'm going to do the deciding myself. We'll fight—and that means my whole gang that's here."

Thus it was settled. Kris turned carefully to the native messenger. "Go back and tell the Russian that we refuse his terms," he said. "Tell him that the United States government has never treated with pirates or riffraff of any kind, and that we don't intend to begin now."

There ensued a brief pause. Loring's eyes were two glittering diamonds. "You see, Micah, the Russian is very strong on pirate tradition," he explained. "You don't know what that means, but no matter. But Nick may understand when you tell him that Uncle Sam has some traditions that concern pirates himself. You can refer him to the Bey of Tripoli."

The native mumbled the term to fix it in his mind. Straightway he trudged down the hill to Nick.

The Russian screwed his monocle into his eye, posed, and waited confidently for news of his foes' surrender. "Well?" he demanded harshly. As if he did not already know the garrison's answer! At the most they would merely plead for better terms. They were outnumbered, outarmed. And it was London Nick—the Tiger of the Cheka—the man whose very name once scourged like the east wind throughout the breadth of the Red Empire—who waited beyond the barricade.

The native faltered only a moment. He found that he had forgotten his chief's exact words, but at least he remembered the burden of them. "He say he no talk business with riffraff."

Nick did not start. He possessed a marvelous

physical control. But his face seemed to darken, and his Oriental eyes grew steely bright. "Is that all?" he asked carefully.

"He say Uncle Sam hang pirates, but no sign papers with 'em," the native continued calmly. "That's about all he say, but Cap'n Webber—Loring, they call him—he say something too."

Nick held hard. "And what did my friend Loring say?"

"Let me think. He say you go to some bay—Trip—Triplet—oh, devil, I don't remember. Anyway"—and the brown man looked the white in the face—"he say you go plumb straight to hell!"

And then Nick's treasured calm fell away. He smote the messenger with savage violence, and his heavy pistol leaped out of its holster in a black streak. Up the hill whined its futile lead—the first shot of the engagement.

CHAPTER XX

NO GUNFIRE answered Nick. Loring had no intention of risking his small store of rifle ammunition at four hundred yards. His men took refuge behind the breastworks and quietly waited.

The pirates began a sporadic fire. The islanders were too well protected to take any great harm, but the bullets whistled over them and thwacked the earth about them, and one of them pierced Big Kris's hat. The shave was close enough for anyone, but instead of lowering the men's morale, it called forth only ribald mirth. And when Kris cracked a time-honored joke, excited but thrilling laughter rang all along the thin line.

"It's a goot t'ing I didn't wear a cap," the Norwegian said.

The fire continued on and off all afternoon. Only one man was struck—a sailor who took a Springfield bullet through the thick of his arm. Evidently the steel made a clean hole through his muscle, because he did not seem in the least disturbed, and he rolled a one-handed cigarette while his injured arm was being bandaged. Since he was a pistol fighter anyway, he did not surrender his place on the firing line.

The shots grew farther and farther apart as the shadows lengthened, and at last they stopped altogether. After posting guards, Loring led most of his men into the *barabara* for rest. Here they found old Wing cheerfully and competently cooking the evening meal.

For a moment Loring forgot the battle, and let his imagination soar. . . . It was long and long since these walls of sod had known the flicker of firelight. It was years and years since the ancient fireplace had felt life in its stony womb. Yet Loring could see in fancy a leather-faced old Indian woman stooping beside the flame, the kettles hanging, and the little poochkies sizzling five in a row. Children with dusky eyes clung to her dress, and sometimes wept, and sometimes plucked at the bread she had set off to cool. The room was warm, close, full of cozy sound and acrid, Asiatic smells. Although she did not know it—or know the meaning of the word—she was a greater alchemist than any dark-browed mystic of the middle ages; she had changed this mound of earth and grass into a home.

She had departed long since. The Greek cross that marked her resting-place had molded in the fog, rotted and fallen away. Her children were old people, themselves muttering of the "old days"—the days before the bearded Muscovites got in their ships and sailed away . . . but the *barabara* still stood, and the moss was ever greener and richer on its walls. The little

poochkies still darkened the air in millions along the bird cliffs, and the seals still darkened the shore. . . .

The phantom figure before the hearth faded from Loring's sight, and left old Wing, busy with his pots and pans. Wing, at least, was not haunted by ghosts. He was cooking supper calmly as in his own kitchen at the Fisheries mess. True, things weren't quite so convenient. He could make good coffee, but there was no place properly to bake a pie. Even so, a chef who had served warm meals from a ship's galley throughout ten days of a Cape Horn storm should not object to a turf-house hearth. At least his pans stayed in one place.

What did he do for fuel? Not a stick of wood grows on St. Paul—and certainly the pirates had guarded the warehouses where coal was stored. Wing had solved the problem easily enough. He had simply stood by St. Paul tradition. While he had foraged for food and water, he had sent three of the native boys to the killing ground—the damp moors where the seals are driven and slaughtered. These places were apart from the village and unguarded, so the Aleuts went back and forth without difficulty. They had returned with about two hundredweight of seal-blubber—the fuel of the Pribilofs since time out of mind.

After the men had eaten, Loring led Little Kris to a lonely spot on the hill. Plainly he had something on his mind; there was a gleam between his lids which Kris could not remember seeing before, even in the

thickest of the firing. They sat down, for a moment, watching the village dissolve in fog. It would be a black night of clouds and misty rain.

Loring soon came to business. "Kris, our friend Nick is just about through fooling," he said.

"You mean—he's going to start something?"

"Yes. That little rifle fire today was just a curtain-raiser, so to speak. He wasn't really trying—he was either indulging his love for the dramatic, or else stringing us along to put us off our guard. I suppose he'd like to have us think that this kind of a fight is all he has in him—a little sniping at long range. But if anybody has such an idea of London Nick, it's time he got over it."

"No one can look into those fishy eyes and have any such idea," Little Kris observed.

"Good. The Nick I know is a relentless, indomitable man, brave as a lion. That fire today didn't do him justice, and that's why I'm twice as scared as if he'd gone after us hammer and tongs. You want to know what he's doing now? He's organizing his forces to charge the hill and clean us out."

"Tonight?" Little Kris asked the question mildly, and Loring's eyes paused for a brief second on his. By the gods of war, this Fisheries man would pass muster! Loring recalled a comrade or two on other hills, in other battles. Most of these comrades had now departed—vanishing almost without trace in the track of a nine-inch shell in France, or perhaps passing

in unseemly fashion at the hands of Chinese torturers in a late unimportant fracas in the province of Kiang—but when they had lived, they had addressed a man in this same tone.

"I don't think he'll attack tonight," Loring answered presently. "He's not such a fool as to come charging up here in the dark and let us ambush him. He's in a hurry to clean us out, but as usual, he'll keep his head. I expect him to strike the first thing tomorrow morning."

"And what will happen then?"

"That's what I want to talk about. I want to point out where we're weak and where we're strong. Kris, our men are all right. They're all ages and all breeds, but somehow or other they're all shock troops. I suppose they wouldn't be here, in this ungodly north country, if they weren't fighters. But Kris, their armament is all wrong."

"Of course it is. Only one modern rifle in the gang. The rest all short-range shotguns and revolvers."

"Which means, our men can't do much killing until the enemy is practically on top of us. We can't pick 'em off, and demoralize them, as they're charging up the hill. We need rifles, Kris—which of course we can't get—and we need something else, too."

Loring's tone was so strange, somehow so tense, that Kris was startled. "What are you hinting at?" he demanded. Then, drily: "I suppose you'll tell me that

we need machine-guns, and hand-grenades, and liquid fire."

"No. All those things you mention are modern inventions. It's only since yesterday that they've taken a part in warfare. The thing that I refer to has dominated battlefields for three hundred years and more. And it surely plays havoc with the enemy."

Kris's eyes suddenly got round. "Artillery fire?" he breathed.

"Yes. 'The volleying and the thundering of cannon!'"

Suddenly both men were on their feet. Their eyes were lurid in the twilight. "But man, you're crazy!" Kris was saying. "You can't make it shoot. It hasn't been fired for sixty years and more, and would blow up at the first charge. You haven't any powder or any cannonballs—"

"Let's go look at it," Loring interrupted. Swiftly he led the way to the old bronze cannon, waiting so grimly on the hilltop. It was just where the Muscovite had left it sixty years before. Its black muzzle still pointed out over the slope, menacing an invisible enemy far at sea. To Loring's glittering eyes, it was like a strong guardsman whose watch was a century long.

"Look at it!" he urged Kris. "See—it's mounted on iron. Otherwise it would have fallen to the ground long ago. It's still got rollers under it, so it can

heave back from the recoil, and with some wooden wedges to slip under the breach it can cover the hillside. Why won't it shoot, man? It looks strong as ever. It hasn't got a crack in it, and even its touchhole is still open—"

"Have you ever fired such a gun?"

"No, but I'm willing to try it. I've fired almost everything else in the way of a piece—in my various little skirmishes here and there—and I know how it works."

"But powder—cannonballs—"

"I've got that all figured out. We can give her a charge that will either sweep the hill or else split the barrel wide open. And I'll fire her myself—no one else need stand by."

"Oh, go to blazes!" Kris told him shortly. "I stand by too—you crazy fool!"

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN the dusk lowered, a grim detachment of three set out from the garrison. Loring was one, of course—Johnston was another—Captain Storkersen was the third. The captain was cured of his wound, and no more did he reel on the trail. His ox-like shoulders and apelike arms made him an ally not to be despised.

First there was a guard to pass. Nick had posted a ring of sentries all along the base of the hill. They heard the man tramping up and down the wet road; they saw his cigarette glow in the dark. Should they attempt to steal by him, or to silence him by such certain means as men can be silenced? The former was the best chance, so when he was at the far end of his patrol, they crept through in a stealthy file.

From thence they went to a small square building beyond the village. There was no guard here; and Johnston had a key to fit the door. If the foragers had been smoking, they would have now knocked out their pipes and stamped out the glowing ends of their cigarettes. And it would not be for fear that the little torches might be seen in the dark. This structure was the St. Paul powder-house, where Johnston

kept dynamite and black powder to use in making roads.

Loring took two canisters of the powder, one in each arm, and Johnston took a short length of quick fuse. The detachment now crossed over to the island by-products plant, where some construction had been going on. Here Johnston found two big logging-chains, used in earth-moving.

One of these chains was a fair load for a strong man. Storkersen took both of them. Then the raiders began their slow stalk back to their own lines.

Nearing the village road, they paused to reconnoiter. Loring and Storkersen hovered beside an empty building; Johnston crept down the alley between two rows of native huts. He was now in the center of enemy territory. Twice he waited while heavy feet tramped by; once he heard a group of the corsairs talking over their plans for the morrow. He made his way at last to the Fisheries tool-house.

This building had been broken into already so he had no need of his key. He slipped through the broken door, procured a cold-chisel and a heavy hammer, and stole forth again. Presently he rejoined his companions.

Once more the three went forward, and now they must pass again through the enemy lines. This time they could not trust to stealth alone. Storkersen carried the chains as noiselessly as he could, but occasionally the great links rattled and rang, sounds that

carried far in the hushed dark. So the big skipper laid down his burden and crept ahead to clear the trail. Johnston was reminded of the Alaskan bears. The huge, shaggy Kadiak could swing along on his big pads with this same stealth. Instantly the darkness swallowed Storkersen's big frame; and the vast and brooding silence consumed the last of his little sounds.

There ensued a long wait, indicating that he had reached the road and was crouching beside it, a heavy army pistol ready in his hand. Down the wet gravel the guard's feet came crunching.

The nearing steps were heavy, lazy and somewhat unsteady. Storkersen grinned a little, and perhaps envied a little, as he guessed the reason. Since the night was chill, and the job merely a time-killer at best, the sentry had sought inner comfort. He had taken the merest taste every time he completed the beat. Now the flask was empty and he, naturally enough, was otherwise. And suddenly into his rosy fancies a harsh whisper crackled.

"Stick 'em up!" someone ordered.

The next second was one of deadly possibilities. Storkersen's position was not secure by any means. Everything depended on the nature and the courage of this particular guard. Both men were armed, both could see each other vaguely in the darkness; they had an equal chance to kill or be killed. Indeed, in one sense the sentry had the better chance. It was his

first shot; Storkersen was afraid to shoot lest he call in the other guards. And certainly there were plenty of men in the ship's company—gamblers unafraid to toss a coin with death—who would have answered the hold-up with the emphatic voice of a rifle.

Fortunately it was Gordon, the long-armed man of all work, who had the duty. Like most brutes, he lacked the higher degrees of courage; and he was particularly cowardly at times like this, when strong drink had exalted him to the stars and, dying away, had let him fall again. Gordon craved life with a wild beast's passion. He could not bear to go out like this—in the dark, in the silence and almost sober. So he let his rifle fall to the ground.

Storkersen had no need to speak again. Indeed, in a second or two more, any word of his would have gone unheard. He had struck swiftly and handily with the pistol barrel, and now Gordon lay calmly sleeping with the rain-mist in his face. The big skipper picked up the fallen rifle, cursed at his victim's meager supply of ammunition, and rejoined his friends. Gathering up his chains, he led the way up the hill.

Near the top they came upon a solitary figure. At first they thought it was Wing, just returned from another foraging expedition to the native houses below, but presently a white skirt glimmered wanly in the dusk. It was Hilda, and she seemed to have a small parcel under her arm.

"What are you doing here?" Loring demanded. "Why aren't you resting?"

"Why aren't you resting yourself?" she replied with spirit. "Anyway, we're fighting a war, aren't we?"

With this cryptic remark she turned and entered one of the *barabaras*. The three men continued their work. With the hammer and cold-chisel, Storkersen began to cut the heavy chain into six-foot lengths. Far below in the village the corsairs heard the ring of the steel, and wondered idly what midnight task the garrison was pursuing. In any event it would be futile. The little band of defenders, armed only with shotguns and pistols, could not hold out long. Noon tomorrow would see them prisoners.

After the chains were cut, Loring opened one of the powder canisters. Its contents looked like black dirt, but really it was concentrated thunder embodying more power than the jar of the jinnee in the tale of the Bagdad fisherman. Loring removed about four pounds of the powder and thrust it into the deep gullet of the old Russian cannon. Then with a stick from the turf-house frame and a rag torn from a native's shirt he wadded it down.

On top of the powder, for a missile, he thrust in one of the six-foot lengths of chain. After inserting a piece of fuse into the touch-hole, the cannon was ready.

Loring appointed a guard detail and went to rest. The night wore on. A harrowing stillness hung over

the village, broken at last by cries ringing up and down the line of enemy guards at the base of the hill. For the first time they had discovered a breach in the patrol. When they called to Gordon, he did not answer. Torches flickered, streaked back and forth, and finally stopped and milled around a black shadow in the road. Soon there were angry voices—threats of vengeance—as two men bore away the sleeper's heavy form.

The darkness waned. Dawn came stealing over the eastern seas. The seals roared in welcome—the same triumphant chorus that had wakened the sleeping walrus herds ten thousand years ago. What did the swarming beaches know of the war now waged in their behalf? What did they care about the tense lines, the cocked and ready rifles, the watchful sentries? They knew only that an ancient miracle was before their sight once more. Again the gulls would shriek over the shore; the bird rookeries would waken to clamor; the foxes would steal forth on velvet feet. The business of the island would be transacted just the same as in the ice age: the pups would nurse, the cows would fish at sea. The seals had their own wars to look to. The old harem masters must fight for their thrones in the boulders. They must guard their wives against robber seals, and intimidate the idle bulls that lurked back of the beaches. Why should they concern themselves with the affairs of men?

The dawn light spread. The little white shacks of

the natives began to glimmer in the gloom. The gray of the sea changed to deep purple. And now a guard rose from his post and came to waken Loring.

"They're getting ready to charge," he said simply.

Loring wakened the men, and they went to their posts. At the base of the hill they could see the pirates deploying in a long line. And when they looked closer, a strange, stricken little gasp moved from throat to throat like a wind.

And this wind bit cruelly. It blew despair to Loring's heart. Only too well he knew its source: it was the breath of fear—of a sick and racking dread that might at any moment swell to a gale of terror. The fighting spirit of the force was in jeopardy. Utter defeat hovered near—before a shot was fired.

He had heard this sound before. It had presaged a disastrous rout that day near Amiens, when the Boches had launched their terrible counter-attack. Little Kris had never heard it, but he read its menace just the same. "Steady! Steady!" he was urging. Meanwhile the other leaders were setting an example of calmness to the men.

Had cowardice cropped out at last in the thin line of the garrison? Far from it. The fear that swept the breastworks was no blind and sheeplike panic, but a physical dread instinctive as breathing. Loring felt it the same as the others, and only because of his long battle experience was he able to control it. Yet it

might shatter hope like cowardice itself. It might hurl down utter disaster upon the island.

Certainly the fear had full cause. It was not mere despair at the sight of superior numbers, but the ancient, half-animal, abysmal horror of steel.

The corsairs had sprung a surprise of their own. Zigzag lights played over their long line. Each man carried a rifle, and at least every alternate weapon was tipped and flamed by a bayonet.

The spirit of the blade! It was as potent now as when the Romans marched on Gaul. No wonder that Nick's lucky find—a store of bayonets that went with the Springfield rifles from the station arsenal—had seemed to promise him an easy victory.

"Steady! Steady!" Little Kris was murmuring.

Then: "Buck up!" Loring cried. "We'll blast 'em before they ever get up the hill!"

Probably his words were not needed. These lean Yanks and stout Norsemen would bend a long way before they broke. In any event, he was never to know. A signal more inspiring than any word of man suddenly flashed over the barricade.

The frightened gasp became an exclamation. The exclamation rose to a shout. The shout passed from man to man, as the gasp had done before, and grew into a mighty cheer. And the cheer ended in a war-like roar such as had never risen from the hills of St. Paul before. The Yanks were ready to begin.

Loring, who had been watching the flashing bay-

onets below, whirled about in amazement. And now he understood; and no wonder the highest fighting fervor that his life had ever known swept like hot quicksilver through his veins. Above the green arch of the *barabara,* fastened to a broomstick which in turn was thrust into the stovepipe, fluttered the Yankee flag.

Hilda's own hands had fastened it there. And now Loring knew what parcel she had carried under her arm, when he had met her on the hillside in the dark. She also had gone forth into No Man's Land. She had stolen down to the village schoolhouse and procured the flag which she used in teaching Americanism to little Aleut boys and girls.

Brown-skinned children had marched to it once, and sung patriotic songs in their shrill Asiatic voices. They had not understood its meaning—its eloquence greater than any statesman's oration—but their deep-set somber eyes had lighted with its beauty. And now these soldiers' eyes were lighted too. Perhaps they also failed to understand its full meaning and message, yet they knew it stood for a great thing, a thing greater than life. Small though it was—cheaply made and its colors printed on cotton—still it must not bow down to pirates. It must not be trampled upon by shame.

It fluttered above the ramparts. It changed the whole issue of the conflict. No longer were they merely defending the seals and their island homes against aggression. They were upholding a cause be-

yond them and above them—an idea—a dream—a delusion, perhaps, yet worth more than all the other delusions that make up life. They could no longer think rationally, balancing one thing with another, weighing the risk of their lives against the importance of their cause. Indeed, they could hardly remember their cause, except in its broadest aspects. They were simply swept away on the wind of war. They were lost in the old madness—the ancient glory.

They could not march or sing songs to the flag, as the Aleut children had done, but they could fight for it. "I'll back it to the limit!" one of the sailors cried —and no one wondered, and no one thought him a fool.

Loring crept by it and lay beside his cannon.

As the enemy was forming his battle line, and the garrison waited for orders, Hilda came to touch Loring's arm. No more was she the valiant spirit that had raised the flag over the barricade. As she crawled toward him her face was haggard, and tears lay in her lashes. "Aren't you going to tell me good-by?" she demanded.

"Good-by?"

"Yes. How do I know I'll ever see you again? If those brutes get up here, they'll kill you sure. They may spare the others, but they'll kill you—at the first volley. And yet you lie there with a light in your eyes—"

"I'm not figuring on getting killed," he told her in dazed surprise. "And I was just interested in firing this cannon—"

"Yes, and have it explode and blow you all to pieces! What right have you to throw away your life—like a fool? I suppose it means nothing to you, but—but—"

"Good Lord, Hilda!" Suddenly he forgot the dawning battle—the flashing bayonets in front and the fluttering flag above—and saw only this tearful child beside him. "You are part woman, aren't you, and not all soldier?"

"Part woman, but mostly baby," she told him, wiping at her tears. "I should be in the house with the other women, instead of crying out here. But I want to tell you—that I'm praying for you, Paul. I'm praying for you to come through."

He could not smile now. His eyes met hers, and slowly widened. "Your prayer ought to save me, Hilda," he told her gently. "If any prayers are heard, yours should be. And now—in case something happens—shall we say good-by?"

"Yes. Just a word to remember you by." Her tears flowed again, and she tried to smile through them. "Good-by, Paul. We've been good friends—"

"More than friends," he corrected. He gathered in both her hands. "No friend—and I've had lots of 'em—has been to me what you have been. Now I'm going to tell you a secret—a secret that I meant to keep

a long time yet. But I can't keep it any more. I've decided that if something happens to me, I'd want you to know the truth."

"I know the truth already," she told him. "But I want you to tell me—"

"I love you. That's all the secret—just those three words. And if you don't understand, there is nothing I can say or do to make you understand—"

"I do understand. . . . I'm glad you told me. . . . I don't know for sure, but I think I love you, too. . . . So good-by, Paul."

"Good-by, Hilda."

Her lips were near, so he bent his head. An old and eloquent sign passed between them, and then she was gone.

And now the zero hour. Nick called his orders to advance. The men of the garrison lay to their weapons, their jaws hard, their fingers tense at their triggers. "Don't shoot till I give the word!" Loring directed. "I've got a surprise for 'em, first."

Little Kris crept back to the cannon. He could not assist at the firing, but he could share Loring's risk, just the same. And now the long line of foes was moving nearer. They came boldly, in the open, confident that the garrison had practically no long-range weapons and that they could wipe it out from a safe distance. Their triumphant shouts rang up the hill.

Loring signaled to Kris, and they stood beside the cannon. Its breach lifted by wedges, its muzzle sloped

down almost parallel with the slope of the hill. A match cracked in Loring's hand.

He touched the fuse. A thin flame ran, like a mouse, to the touch-hole of the cannon. There was an instant's silence in which all motion and all sound was suspended, and life itself paused in Loring's breast. Then the whole hill seemed to explode.

But the old bronze held. The long-drawn thunderous roar that shook the hill was only the cannon's voice, fair-spoken to the foe below. A great column of fire belched forth, and dense black smoke hid gun and gunner. And then out of the thunder rose a mighty clatter and ring, as a terrible missile hurtled through the air.

The advancing riflemen had paused when they saw Loring stand up by the cannon. His head and shoulders had emerged above the rampart, offering a fair target, but at first they had been too startled to shoot. The old Russian gun had not entered into their calculations at all, and the menace of its black mouth froze them in their tracks. Then they saw its fiery breath burst out in a round column through billowing smoke.

The next instant a swishing demon was among them. It struck the ground in front of their line and leaped on toward them like an enormous serpent. The torn earth and grass flew up behind it, and a man's voice rose in a wail in front. And then the uproar passed, and the hill was still once more.

Terror lived on Nick's face as he looked down his

line. Not many times had men seen it there, but now its stamp was plain. Yet he dared to believe that the hissing, clattering chain had missed. As far as he could tell, it had leaped harmlessly between two of his men. A cry of triumph rose in his throat.

But the cry ended in an oath. Someone was lying, ominously still, in the lush weeds. And the weeds were no longer green. They seemed gay with the tints of autumn.

The men were gathering around, gazing as if they did not understand. For certainly the missile had made no direct hit. It had swished on down the hill with unabated violence. Yet the man in the grass failed to get up; he failed to move at all.

It turned out that the last link of the chain, like a whip lash, had flicked him as it passed. It was only a tap, yet it had sufficed. Black O'Neil had partaken of his last mutiny. No wonder the men shrank back, hovering like hunted partridges close in the grass.

Before the smoke had cleared away, Loring had started to wipe out the cannon with wet grass. This was essential: otherwise the hot residue of the explosion would ignite the next charge before he could fully load. With Kris's help he rammed in a quantity of powder, compressed it with a rag, and armed it with another length of chain. The process was half complete before the buccaneers thought to fire upon him, and then their shots flew wild. For the moment they seemed to have lost their grip.

But the garrison must not exult too soon. Their victory was still far off, and indeed to all appearances they had merely postponed certain defeat. There was a stronger man than Black O'Neil in command of the enemy line. London Nick had been shaken at first, but his lion heart was swelling in his breast again.

He stood up, bravely ignoring the possibility that his foes possessed a rifle or two and might fire on him at long range, and looked with contempt upon his men.

"What ees the matter," he demanded. "Are you men, or are you rabbits, to be scare' away wif one shot? Will you throw away a king's treasure because one of you ees kill?"

"But that big gun is the devil!" someone protested.

"Yes, but it ees only a chance that O'Neil was struck. Spread out wider, and the nex' shot will strike no one at all. And remember—if you keep on going, they can only fire once. You can reach the top of the hill, and haf them on the points of your bayonets, before they can load again." Then, with unmistakable dignity: "Listen, you beardless eunuchs. You can stay here if you so dezire. Myself and whatefer men are among you will go up and take the hill alone."

Only those who stood near him could hear his calm tones, but everyone saw the significant gesture that he made. Leisurely and carefully he screwed his dandling monocle into his eye-socket. He looked around, gaped, and then started walking up the hill.

It was a bold bluff, but it worked. Someone shouted,

and a cheer passed down the line. And then the men arose and swept forward again.

On the hill above, the garrison got ready to meet the charge. It was not likely that the swishing chain would stop them this time. Loring turned to Lane, who held a long-range rifle in a fond grip.

"Can you hit Nick from here?" he demanded.

"He's keeping pretty much out of sight behind the curve of the hill," Lane answered tensely. "I'll fire at the first chance."

"Good. The rest of you hold your volley till I give the word. I'm going to save the cannon till they close in just below us."

So once more the garrison grew tense and still. Everywhere down the barricade ran the little click-clack of cocking hammers. Lane was watching for Nick to appear above a low rise in the contour of the hill; his eye was cold and fishy over the rifle-sights. The men breathed slowly and deeply, waiting for the wild, stabbing rush that now seemed inevitable. The foe was only two hundred yards distant now, and advancing swiftly. The Island War had reached its crisis at last.

But suddenly the charge was checked. The line halted, swaying; the men faltered and lifted horror-drawn faces. The air was hissing again. The hiss rose to a whine, the whine to a banshee scream, and a black streak, all but too fast for the eyes to follow, smote the hill. With it, drowning out the scream and

obliterating all other sound, was a tremendous crashing explosion. A geyser of dirt flew up in the open space thirty yards in front.

At first they dared to think that Loring had fired his cannon again. Yet the scream came from one side, rather than from the hill, and the violence of the blow was a hundredfold that of the chain. As a matter of fact, the men of the garrison had been stricken no less than themselves, and likewise lifted frozen faces to the shrieking air. It was only when a booming roar rolled tardily in over the water of the bay—seemingly a full second after the crash—that these faces lighted with glory.

The men who were nearest to the explosion were thrown down by the rush of air, and many were so stunned and shell-shocked that they did not at once realize the thing that had come to pass, but there was one man in the line who instantly grasped the truth. Before the thrown rocks had fallen, Nick turned and looked out over the bay. A gray ship lay there, and a wisp of gray smoke was still drifting up from a five-inch gun on her deck.

Looking closer, he saw that the village cove was swarming with traffic. Oars were flashing, and a fleet of surf boats were beating into shore. The sea's gleam ran like flame along fifty bayonets, and the morning light was gay on fifty jackets of blue.

Captain O'Day and his guardsmen had arrived on scheduled time.

CHAPTER XXII

IT WOULD have been a fitting and splendid thing if the pirates had stood their ground. Thus they might have ended their last great adventure in glory and blood. They might have gone down fighting, true to the name of buccaneer, faithful to the last to the traditions of the gentlemen. But no such magnificent gesture came to pass. Only a few of their number had sufficient iron in their souls to die for a lost cause —Alaskan Pete, the little bolt-cracker Brophy, and some of the blond sailors—and these few were crushed and overburdened by the cowardice of their fellows. Haycox, the deserter, was first to break. He dropped his rifle and his arms went stiff as ramrods above his head. One after another of the men in the line followed his example.

On the rampart there was an outbreak of utter delirium. The men roared, and threw their hats, and fired their guns, and danced in grotesque abandon; the women wept and embraced and fainted. Only when a lone bullet whizzed among them—narrowly missing Loring's head—did they regain a semblance of reason. Who had fired this tardy shot Loring did not know, but he could guess.

Hate had governed Nick to the last. He had even risked his last card—one that he had treasured for a final emergency—to hurl a screaming bullet toward his enemy. Then, as his men dropped their arms and prepared tamely to surrender to the advancing guardsmen, he slipped from the line and disappeared among the native houses.

Only Loring saw him go. The captain of the garrison had remained somewhat aloof from the islanders' jubilee—musing darkly that he himself might so easily have been one of the hopeless, beaten band below—and thus his eyes were open to every movement on the slope. And now the others wondered why he should cry out and leap down from the breastworks.

He guessed the truth. Nick was betraying his men just as he had betrayed Loring. Cold as steel to the last, he was making a final desperate break for freedom. On the far side of Reef Point he had concealed a horse—a wooden horse that could ride the imprisoning gray seas. This was the boat in which the spies had landed from the Jutland; near by was hidden a small sail, water-casks, and a store of provisions. If he reached the craft alive, he might beat out through the surf.

There were only two ships to follow him—the Enterprise and the Eider—and it might be that before they could steam out of the bay and encircle the island, he would be lost in the haze. When the sea was clear he would take down his sail and drift, a mere black

dot on the interminable spaces of the deep. At night, and in the drifting fog, he could sail; and if his luck gods were with him, he might in time reach the Siberian coast, seven hundred miles distant.

It was true that rifle-fire could stop him quickly. Men could follow him to the beach and destroy him before he could work out through the surf. So the rifles must be silenced. And this was just a detail of his plan.

As he ran through the village he scooped up a native child. It proved to be a girl, about seven years old, but she would protect him better than plates of steel. Neither the guardsmen nor the islanders would fire as long as she was in his arms, or occupied his boat with him.

It was only a chance, desperate and dim, but worth trying. Would it be for London Nick, once the viceroy of an empire, to languish tamely in a Yankee prison? Apparently no one had seen him slip away from the line, and he had a long start.

Yet all was not as well as he hoped. He had at least one pursuer. Moreover, this bloodhound on his trail was swept along by hatred second only to his own. Loring had not forgotten the episode of the plank. His pagan soul had prayed for a chance to settle his score with the Russian; and when he saw the snatching up of the child—an act which would excuse and justify his own long-cherished vengeance—his strange heart leaped in his breast.

Never would he have been able to kill Nick in cold blood. He could not even have fired upon him, had the man fled alone. Such work remained for the blue-jackets who were the provost guard of the sea—and would be unseemly in a man who had himself conspired against the island. He could battle valiantly for his birthplace, but he could not act as judge of his former comrades. However, he was now freed of all restraint. Where there was a child's life to fight for, the hands of his vengeance were no longer tied.

Nick was plainly heading for the reef. Loring, who knew the island far better, took a short cut across the dunes. Because the slope hid him, and the long grass softened his steps, he approached his quarry within fifty yards before he was discovered.

He had stolen up to Garbach rookery, by which Nick must pass. As he reached the huge stones of the cliff edge—piled so wantonly and so carelessly by the island's archaic gods—he saw the Russian mounting the rise. Still he held the screaming child against his breast. His face was like flint, and his eyes were great yellow diamonds under his black brows.

This was a fitting scene for their final meeting-place . . . the shore and the sea, the rocks and the dunes, the silence and the clamor of the seals. . . . And now these ancient foes met to settle their score according to old rules.

They had no words. Their voices would hardly carry above the thunderous seal roar that beat up from

the unseen rookery under the cliff. And why should they complicate their simple issue with mouth-sounds? They already understood each other. Each knew that the other sought his life—nothing less and nothing more. Fond though he was of speech—vain of his diction on suitable occasion—the Russian would now stand aside for a more eloquent spokesman. The heavy pistol that he carried in his hand would voice him clearly enough. Loring's eyes, on his part—glittering like ice from the shadow of a huge boulder behind which he crouched—spoke plainer than any speech.

Yet Loring made no attempt to ambush his enemy. Such would be like eating a fine meal without wine. The rock behind which he crouched was not an ambush, but a shield to square the odds of battle. However, he took the first shot. The time for chivalry was past; and besides, his foe's weapon lay ready in his hand. He aimed carefully for Nick's thighs—below his living shield—and pressed the trigger.

He missed, and Nick replied with the speed of a leaping snake. The bullet chipped the rock close to Loring's face. Made desperate by the miss Nick fired a second time, and a third—vicious barks that cut through the clamor of the seals. He had only two shells remaining when he thought to drop down on the grass and thus protect his entire body with that of the child.

Still his fury betrayed him. Haste, also, made its

proverbial waste. He thought that pursuers were close behind. He heard a voice, shrill and frantic, piercing the deep roar of the rookeries. Yet this was not the nearing cry of guardsmen. The bluejackets that had swarmed off the Enterprise had not yet discovered Nick's flight. It was only an old Indian woman, running and wailing after her child. Thus Fate exacted a mean vengeance upon him. Believing that all was lost, he fired his last two shells.

He fired them with a yell of hate. And it was a Russian yell—fierce and wild as if the beloved English speech were forgotten long since. Still Loring's body did not drop down. Still he hovered behind the barricade of rock, waiting for the Russian to offer a fair target.

And now Nick hurled away his gun. With a venomous yell he swept the child from in front of him and leaped to his feet. Unarmed, with that lionlike courage which famed him, and which would have honored the best in the land, he sprang straight toward the black menace of his enemy's weapon. He came with wide-open, terrible hands—and Loring aimed at his heart.

Loring had never been a killer. Save in the frenzy of battle he had never taken human life. But now the she-wolf hunting meat for her cubs in the winter forest knew more of mercy than he. His face was granite, his eyes reptilian. Savagely he pressed the trigger.

The hammer snapped. Loring had already fired his

last shot. And it was with a mad, savage rapture that he flung the weapon down and met Nick with his hands.

And this was as it should be. A bullet leaping to Nick's breast could never settle the score as it should be settled. Fate was good, after all. Loring had been saved not only a great shame, but a great loss.

In his heart he had not wanted the fight to end! Perhaps his first love—warmly cherished before ever he had loved a woman or a flag—commanded him still. Perhaps he sensed that this was one of his life's great hours—that when it passed something within him must pass too—a flame, a rapture, a dream. He must drink deep of this cup. All too likely this might be the last battle of his last war. Even if he won—and this terrible Russian was the most deadly foe he had ever faced—he must soon lay down his arms. No longer was he a soldier of the world. From now on he would probably live tamely, under one flag, professing one cause.

So to the fray! His arms went about Nick with abysmal desire. If life cheated him—if he was never to fold a sweetheart to his breast—at least he would have known one memorable embrace In its fierce heat all other loves were forgotten—Hilda herself was as a dim figure in a dream. And this passion was not to create life, as love's passion is, but to destroy it. Its prize was death. Its climax would be the speeding of a soul.

There would be no subtleties to this fight. There would be no grace, no chivalries. Its issues were direct and unclouded. Nick was no longer fighting for liberty, but only for hate. No more did Loring battle in a child's cause; the little Indian girl that hovered like a wounded fox in the grass had been only an incident at most. She would merely live to tell how she alone had seen the great fight at Garbach rookery, when the two captains met to settle their final score.

The drama was as basic and primitive as the scene in which it was enacted—these cliffs and the smooth-worn beaches of the seals. The roar that rose, exciting them to even greater passion, was one of the ancient voices—thundering out on the winds of the earth's morning, before man ever launched a ship or chipped a flint.

The two men caught their holds, wrenched, staggered, and toppled to the ground. So evenly were they matched that at first neither could break the lock of the other's arms, and thus for long seconds they lay without visible motion. Only their tortured muscles and rigid tendons revealed the silent savagery of their fray. But this awful trance could not endure long. If their nerves did not break their hearts must soon—self-shattered by their own cruel beating. One of the two adversaries must give way in a moment more.

Nick's right hand was at Loring's throat. Exerting utmost pressure—a power that seemed to rise from the spirit rather than from twisted muscles—Loring broke

the hold. Then there followed a single moment of violent motion—the two men writhing and threshing in the grass. Finally they began to roll toward the cliff edge.

Once more they were locked in an embrace of hate. Their long, slow motions suggested the sinuous coiling of fighting serpents. Presently they found themselves at the very brink of the cliff which dropped fifteen feet straight down to the sloping beach of Garbach rookery. And now Loring launched a last offensive.

Slowly, patiently, he began to try to push his enemy over. Nick saw his intention, and his eyes protruded and his face was black as the lava rock itself. He made magnificent resistance. He called upon the last reserves of his mighty strength—such strength as is seen now and then among the big Russian men, and which, in his case, languor and posings had so well concealed.

Yet Loring was the master. This almost incredible thing was true. Although he did not possess such superbly developed muscles as those that moved under the Russian's foppish garb, he had rarer, greater gifts. His nervous organization seemed to be superior—at least he manifested better co-ordination, a more perfect control over the machine of his body. He could strike first here, then there, focusing on his enemy's weak points, breaking him one place, then another. Besides, he fought in a better cause. A higher spirit bore him on.

First, one of Nick's legs hung over the cliff, then the other. Here he hung for a long moment, fighting

like a wildcat. Yet still his eyes held only fury, not fear. Not even the threat of immediate death could make him quail. Slowly, with infinite patience, Loring tugged and pried at the hands that clutched him. The left hand fell away, only to clutch the edge of the cliff, and at last the deadly grasp of Nick's right hand was broken too.

With a supreme strength he caught and held the edge of the cliff. In a single second more he could have hurled himself up and resumed the fight. But Loring was of other mind and other desire. He was tired, ready to rest, and the red rage in his heart was almost full-fed. He would not grant another round.

Carefully, with all his weight, he trod on the blue-white clinging fingers.

Presently he had occasion to recall that singular fact in the natural history of seals: the treatment the harem bulls accord any invader of the harems. It may be that once or twice in the history of the rookeries an intruder has made a successful rush and escaped into the water, but if so there is no record of it in the Log of the island.

Seals are near-sighted. They are likely to mistake any moving body for a rival seal. Also, by their law, the rookeries are forbidden territory, and all trespassers are treated the same. Thus it followed that London Nick would not go down to the sea to launch his boat. That part of him which would now depart from the island would need no man-made craft of any kind.

Loring heard a sudden increased clamor from the rookery. It grew in volume and ferocity, and for perhaps two or three minutes the cliff itself seemed to vibrate. Then the tempest of sound slowly waned, until once more only the usual steady uproar rang over the sea and among the grassy dunes.

Peace had come to St. Paul. The dead were buried; the prisoners loaded aboard the Enterprise under guard. The great seal war was over; and because a well-warned congress would now fortify the island, a rover flag might never again fly over the bay.

Captain O'Day made ready to depart. "I don't know but that I ought to take you with me, with the rest of the gang," he told Loring, half in earnest. "I think the government has a pretty fair case against you as an accessory before the fact. I may get called on the carpet for my leniency when I get back."

"I think old Captain Boswell will forgive you," Little Kris ventured. "That old boy is a sportsman. Anyway Loring's original participation in the raid was due to a misunderstanding. Eh, Loring?"

"Worse than a misunderstanding," was the gloomy reply. "Just plain foolishness."

Would Captain O'Day confiscate Storkersen's ship? The big Norwegian could easily prove mutiny, and he could hardly be called to answer for what had occurred after he was dispossessed.

"But that's purely the legal status of the case, as explained to me by the 'ship's lawyer,'" O'Day told him. "By all that's just, your ship should be seized as a prize and you should be allowed to meditate on your sins in a Yankee jail."

"You forget that Storkersen did us some good service," Little Kris urged. "The way he put down the sentry Gordon was simply grand. And he certainly lined up with the rest of us to fight the pirates."

"If he did any fighting for you," O'Day said with twinkling eyes, "it was purely for the fun that the old smuggler got out of it."

"Den go ahead and confiscate der barnacled old wreck," Storkersen declared. "Anyway, I got her insured for more dan she's wort'."

As a matter of fact, O'Day had no such desire. A man's man, he had secret sympathy for both Loring and Storkersen. Besides, he did not wish to start another war. Both of the adventurers had caught the imagination of the islanders, and not readily would they be surrendered to punishment. Indeed, they had come to high honor—a miscarriage of justice, no doubt second only to the killing of the fatted calf at the Prodigal Son's return. There is always more rejoicing for one sinner saved than for ninety-nine faithful. Thus beats the fond and foolish heart of man.

But all this was apart. Loring's destiny hung not on Captain O'Day, not on Little Kris, but on one who was

rarely admitted into the St. Paul councils. Success or failure—not only of this island venture, but perhaps of the whole fulfilment of his fate—depended on a girl's word, a woman's heart.

In a summer twilight Hilda and Loring walked down on the sandy beach beyond the village. They looked at the jellies thrown up by the tide; they gazed out over a sea of burnished steel. And at last Loring turned the girl so that they beheld each other—violet-blue and sea-blue meeting at last.

"Where do I go now, Captain?" Loring asked quietly.

"Go?" the girl echoed in quick alarm. Then, with slowly widening eyes: "Can't you stay here?"

"No. You know how it is with me. You've given me an anchor, but I can't tug at it always. I'm not a derelict any more, and I've got a home port, but I can't be moored in one spot." His eyes lighted up as some poetic side of him swept into dominance. "Can the gulls stay here? Can the seals keep from going to sea?"

"Oh, I might have known!" The girl frowned a little, but presently her brow cleared, and tenderness haunted her lips like a remembered smile. "You're a wanderer yet, in spite of everything. If your captain stays here, you'll sail away anyhow."

"Drift, not sail," he told her, in the same vein. "And that's why the captain must go with me." His hands —hard and lean, but gentle enough, she thought, and

eagerly fumbling—clasped hers. "I want you, Hilda. I love you, my girl. Won't you come?"

She looked up at him, and looked away, and then his eyes drew her back, and his hands drew her toward him. And now she knew her answer. She could not bear to let the seas spread their desolation between them. The waves had brought him to her—drawn by some fateful star—and she must not let them bear him away again.

"I will come," she told him simply. "I love you too. I'll come always—and I'll come now."

So she came—breathlessly and tremulously into his arms. And thus Loring found his treasure after all. Thus, after all his wars, he gained his victory.

They talked awhile of thrilling things. Hilda was of sailor stock, she said—Larsen was a name that rings through marine history as a bell-buoy rings in fog—and it was only fitting that she should go down to the sea in ships. She was blonde, hardy, and the sea's hue was already in her eyes. A cabin aft was her destined home. She would be a mate in more than one sense of the word.

They would sail their own ship. The loot of wars which Loring had saved and Hilda's cache of ivory would thus be put to fair use. Then the dimming harbor lights! The out-trail, and the beckoning horizons! The drum of the screw at the stern, and the crash of seas at the bow. Still dawn, and holy twilight, and beacon star.

Wind, wave and the lances of the rain! North to the berg-jeweled Arctic, where the bowhead spouts and the white bear wanders the floes. South to the Line and beyond, where the picture islands dream in rings of coral. East to the birthplace of the sun, where the purple moon makes a shining road on a silken sea, and the flying-fish dance in the dawns. Then west to the Uttermost West—to the gaudy green isles of the Aleutians.

There were a hundred lands to visit. There were a thousand ports of call. Far harbors to gain, strange sights to see, new stars to follow! Nor would Loring miss the evil wars that he had followed until now. Instead of battling his fellow men, he must strive with sea and storm. The conspiracies of the fog would tax his wits. The raving rush of the typhoon would slake the war fires in his heart.

"But we'll come back to the Pribilofs," Hilda told him. "St. Paul is our own port, you know, and there's where our hearts will stay. When the summer makes the island green, we'll come home."

Yes, they must come home. When the sleek hordes turned northward, they must turn too. Again they would see the fog upon the dunes, the moss lush and fair upon the hills. When the gray coast turned black again with the gathering myriads, a voice would call them over the sea. Again they would hear one of the primal songs of life—the seal song, beating out above the gale.

THE END